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MARCH, 1954 VOL. 7, NO. 6

Galaxy

SCIENCE FICTION

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MOVING DAY (II)

FOR those who came in late, I'll recapitulate a recent argument I had with myself:

One of the most urgent problems facing humanity is growth of population, which is increasing at the rate of 25,000,000 a year. Malthus felt that unless birth is somehow controlled, war, famine and disease must keep population in line with food production. That, of course, was 150 years ago, before agriculture was mechanized. Also, the most devastating wars and famines have occurred since then, though nothing to compare with the great plagues and fires of the Middle Ages. None of Malthus's supposed population checks has yet worked.

What can, then? Science fiction authors generally propose migration—to other planets, various parts of the world, even to bubble cities under the sea.

Right now, today, the solution is no solution at all. The fewest people we could move to control even the present dangerously high level is the annual increase of 25,000,000. We're a long way from being able to transport them to other planets.

That doesn't mean our authors are being visionary. We, better than most, realize that the impossibility of one generation is the commonplace of another.

But population is unreasonable—it obstinately refuses to stop growing until we have the answer. Meanwhile, half-measures will have to serve. Provided, that is, that we can find them.

The Amazing Amazon by Willard Price (John Day, N. Y., $4) vividly charts a "last" frontier that is every bit as amazing as the author claims, and which could help immensely to feed the world, as well as supply minerals and ores that are becoming more and more scarce elsewhere.

Even aside from this discussion, the Amazon River is astronomical enough in size and phenomena to belong to science fiction rather than fact. Just listen:

The mouth of the Amazon is two hundred miles wide — ten times as wide as the English Channel between Dover and Calais, twice as wide as the Mediterranean between Sicily and North Africa.

This "moving sea," as Price justly calls it, represents *one-fifth* of all the running fresh water on Earth.

"Place the mouth of the Amazon at New York and its arms would reach up into Canada and down into Mexico and almost to California," Price states. With

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its 1100 known tributaries, many of them larger than the Rhine, it drains 3,000,000 square miles of land—an area almost as huge as the entire U.S.A.

Ocean vessels can go upriver 2400 miles, along with sharks, tarpons, sawfishes, swordfishes, porpoises and manatees, which thrive in the Amazon.

This most gigantic of rivers even has a tide, a monstrous wave known as the *pororoca,* ten to fifteen feet high, which races up as far as Santarém once a month at the murderous rate of 45 miles an hour.

There are three large islands at the mouth of the river, one of them, Marajó, as big as Denmark or Switzerland.

One hundred miles offshore, a ship can drop buckets and bring up drinkable water, for the sixty billions gallons per hour sweep out with such force that the river continues flowing right in the ocean.

All of this falls into the category of "Well, what do you know?" information, but that is not the reason for this debate. Amazonia is unthinkably rich—it contains the greatest deposits of high-grade iron ore in the world, industrial diamonds, gold, manganese and practically every other metal and mineral—and geologists declare that half of Brazil floats on petroleum. Its forests abound in precious wood of all sorts, from building timber to medicinal roots, barks and berries. Nowhere on Earth is there deeper, blacker topsoil.

What's holding us back? Not the animals, numerous and fearsome as many of them are; they could be exterminated right down to the last anaconda and *piranha,* the notorious cannibal fish. The swarming insects are the major problem. Price's chapter on them is exciting—and dismaying. But he's right: we have techniques that could clear them out.

Logically, it would seem that this is a call for a mass migration to Amazonia. Actually, there is no need for millions to lift anchor and head for the jungle. The small number of food growers we rely on isn't commonly known, but this may give you an idea—12% of the producers supply over 50% of America's food.

As Price points out, the conquest of this vast terrain is no job for individuals, corporations or even any one nation, regardless of its wealth. It is properly the business of the entire world, since the entire world would benefit.

Wait for space travel so we can have planets to provide food and ores? Not when Amazonia is richer than any of the worlds in the whole Solar System!

—H. L. GOLD

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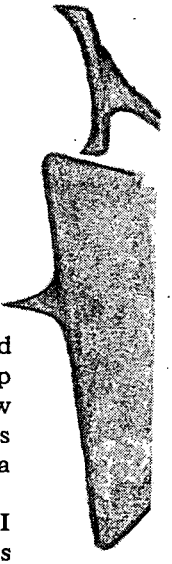
The Telenizer

By DON THOMPSON



WHEN I saw the blood dripping from the tap in the bathtub, I knew that someone had a telenosis beam on me, and I breathed a very audible sigh of relief.

During the past few days, I had begun to wonder if I was really cracking up.

When you start seeing visions of a bearded gent with a halo, or having vague but wonderful dreams about some sort of perfect world, feeling intense loyalties to undefined ideals, and experiencing sudden impulses, sometimes cruel and sometimes kind—you know that something's wrong.

At least I do.

Langston had technicolor delusions; inanimate objects came alive in his hands; THEY were persecuting him, out to get him . . . what a relief it was to know he wasn't going insane!

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If he—whoever he was—had just kept up the slow, subtle pace he'd maintained for the past two or three days, he would have had me in a little while. For whatever he wanted.

But now, he'd overplayed his hand. I knew, at least, what was going on. Who was doing it, or why, I still didn't know—nor whether I could stand it, even knowing.

THE thick, bright red blood dripping steadily from the water tap in the bath tub wasn't so bad.

I stood before the mirror, with my softly humming razor in my hand, and I watched the blood ooze from the tap, quiver as it grew heavy and pregnant, then pull itself free and fall with a dull *plonk* to the enamel as another drop began to form.

That wasn't so bad. But my sigh of relief became a gurgle of almost hysterical apprehension as I braced myself for what might come, with the telenizer knowing that I was aware.

There was something I could do—should do—but my mind refused to focus. It bogged down in a muck of unreasoning terror and could only scream *Why? Why? Why?*

The drops of blood from the water tap increased both in size and rapidity, as I watched. Heavy, red, marble-sized tears followed one another from the tap, *plonk, plonk, plonk,* splashing in the tub and on the floor. Faster and faster, and then the drip became a flow, a gush, as though the vein of some giant creature had been slashed.

The tub filled rapidly, and blood flowed like a crimson waterfall over the edge and across the floor toward me.

I heard a tiny howling, and looked down.

I screamed and threw the soft, brown, fuzzy, squirming puppy-thing that had been a razor into the advancing tide of blood.

The fuzzy thing shattered when it hit the blood, and each of the thousand pieces became another tiny puppy-thing that grew and grew, yapping and swimming in the blood. The tide was now rising about my shoes.

I backed away from the mirror, trembling violently. I forced myself to slosh through the thick blood into the bedroom, groping for a bottle of whisky on the bureau.

"WHAT the hell are you doing here?" the boss asked when I opened his office door and peeked in. "You're supposed to be in Palm Beach. Well, damn it, come on in!"

I clung to the door firmly as I maneuvered myself through the

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opening. And when I closed the door, I leaned back against it heavily.

I could see the boss—Carson Newell, managing editor of Intergalaxy News Service—half rising from behind his big desk across the room; but he was pretty dim and I couldn't get him to stay in one place. His voice was clear enough, though:

"Must be mighty important to bring you back from . . . Damn it, Langston, are you drunk?"

I grinned then, and said, "Carshon. Carton. Old boy. Do you know that telenosis therapy is no sonofabitchin' good on alcoholics?"

Carson Newell sat back down, frowning.

I stumbled to a chair by the corner of his desk and gripped the arms tightly.

"Telenosis therapy," I repeated, "is just no—"

"Snap out of it," Newell barked. "It's no good on dumb animals, either, and you're probably out of range by now, anyway."

He took a small bottle from his desk and tossed a yellow Anti-Alch pill across the desk to me. I popped it into my mouth.

It didn't take long to work. A few minutes later, still weak and a little trembly, I said, "Would have thought of that myself, if I hadn't been so damn drunk."

The boss grunted. "Now what's this business about telenosis?"

"Somebody's been using it on me," I said. "Maliciously. Damn near drowned in a lake of blood from a water faucet."

"Couldn't have been DTs?"

"I'm serious. It's been going on for three or four days now. Not the blood. That's what gave it away. But other things."

"You've been working pretty hard lately," Newell reminded me.

"Which is why I'm on vacation and all nice and relaxed. Or at least, I *was*. No, it's not that. Listen, Carson, I admit that I'm no technical expert on telenosis. But a long time ago—seven or eight years ago, I guess—I did a feature series on it. I learned a little bit. Enough to save my life this time."

Newell shrugged. "Okay. You probably know more about it than I do. I just know it's damned restricted stuff." He paused thoughtfully. "Any missing telenizer equipment would cause a helluva fuss, and there hasn't been any fuss."

"No machines in Palm Beach or vicinity that somebody on the inside could be using illegally?" And then I answered that question myself: "No . . . I doubt it. The machines are used only in the larger hospitals."

"Don't suppose you have any hunches?"

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I shook my head slowly, frowning. "You couldn't really call it a hunch. Just a bare possibility. But I noticed on a news report the other day that Isaac Grogan — you know, 'the Millionaire Mayor of Memphis,' released about a month ago, bribery and corruption sentence — anyway, he's taken up temporary residence in Palm Beach."

The boss rubbed his chin. "As I recall, you did an exposé series on him four or five years ago. Corroborated by official investigation, and Grogan was later sentenced. You thinks he's after revenge?"

I raised a hand warningly. "Now, hold on—I said it was a bare possibility. All I know is that Grogan hates my guts—or might think he has some reason to. I know that Grogan is in Palm Beach, and that I've been under telenosis attack. There's no necessary connection at all."

"No," Newell said. "But it's something to start on." He looked at his wrist watch. "Tell you what. It's nearly noon now. Let's go out for lunch, and while I'm thinking, you can tell me all you remember about telenosis."

IT'S altogether possible that you may have no more than barely heard of telenosis — its technical details are among the most closely guarded secrets of our time. So I'll go over some of the high spots of what I told Newell.

Mind you, I'm no authority on the subject, and it has been a full seven years since I have done any research on it. However, I learned all I know from Dr. Homer Reighardt, who, at the time, was the world's outstanding authority.

Telenosis, nowadays, is confined almost exclusively to use in psychiatric hospitals and corrective institutions. It's used chiefly on neurotics. In cases of extreme dementia, it's worthless. In fact, the more normal you are, the more effective the telenosis.

Roughly — without going into any of the real technicalities — it's this way:

Science has known for a long time that electrical waves emanate from the brain. The waves can be measured on an electroencaphalograph, and vary with the physiological and psychological condition of the individual. Extreme paranoia, for example, or epilepsy, or alcoholism are accompanied by violent disturbances of the waves.

Very interesting, but . . :

It wasn't until 2037 that Professor Martin James decided that these brain waves are comparable to radio waves, and got busy inventing a device to listen in on them.

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The result, of course, was telenosis. The machine that James came up with, after twenty years of work, could not only listen in on a person's thoughts, which are carried on the brain waves, but it could transmit messages to the brain from the outside.

"Unless the waves are in a state of disturbance caused by alcohol or insanity or some such thing?" Newell commented.

I nodded.

"The word 'telenosis' comes from 'hypnosis,' doesn't it?"

"Yes, but not very accurately," I said. "In hypnosis, you need some sort of visual or auditory accompaniment. With telenosis, you can gain control of a person's mind directly, through the brain waves."

"You say 'gain control of a person's mind,'" Newell said. "Do you mean that if you tell someone who is under telenosis to do something, he's got to do it?"

"NOT necessarily," I said. "All you can do with telenosis is transmit thoughts to a person—counting visual and auditory sensations as thoughts. If you can convince him that the thoughts you're sending are *his* thoughts . . . then you can make him do almost anything. But if he knows or suspects he's being telenized—"

"I'm with you," Newell interrupted. "He still gets the thoughts—visions and sounds or what have you—but he doesn't have to obey them."

I nodded. My mind was skipping ahead to more immediate problems. "Don't you suppose we ought to notify Central Investigation Division right away? This is really a problem for them."

But Newell was there ahead of me. "So was the Memphis affair," he said.

I raised my eyebrows.

"Meaning," the boss continued, "that I'd like to give your hunch a play first."

"But it's not even a hunch," I objected. "How?"

"Well, by having you interview Grogan, for instance . . ."

I opened my mouth and almost shook my head, but Newell hurried on. "Look, Earl, it's been a long time since Intergalaxy has scored a good news beat. Not since the Memphis exposé, in fact. Remember that? Remember how good it felt to have your name on articles published all over the world? Remember all the extra cash? The fame?"

I grunted.

"Now before you say anything," Newell said, "remember that when you started on that case you didn't have a thing more concrete to go on than you have right now—just a half a hunch.

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Isn't that right? Admit it!"

"M'm."

"Well, isn't it worth a chance? What can we lose?"

"Me, maybe. But . . ."

The boss said nothing more. He knew that if he let me do the talking, I'd soon argue myself into it. Which I did.

Five minutes later, I shrugged. "Okay. What, specifically, do you have in mind?"

"Let's go back to the office," Newell said.

IT WAS just a short walk. Or, I should say, it would have been a short walk, if we had walked.

But New York was one of the very last cities to convert to the "level" transportation system. It had been one hell of an engineering feat, but for Amerpean ingenuity and enterprise nothing is impossible, so the job had finally been tackled and completed just within the past year. And the novelty of the ambulator bands on pedestrian levels was still strong for native New Yorkers.

So instead of leaving the restaurant on the vehicle level, where we happened to be, and taking an old fashioned sidewalk stroll to the IGN building, Newell insisted on taking the escalator up to the next level and then gliding along on an amband.

That's just the sort of person he is.

When we got back up to his office, he asked, "Isn't there some sort of defense against telenosis? I mean, other than alcohol or insanity?"

I thought for a moment. "Shouldn't be too hard to devise one. All you need is something to set up interference vibrations on the same band as the brain waves you're guarding."

"Sounds simple as hell. Could one of our men do it?"

"A telenosis technician at one of the hospitals could do it quicker," I suggested.

"Without the sanction of C.I.D.? I doubt that."

"That's right," I agreed. "Okay. I'll run down to Technology and see what we can work out. It may take two or three days—"

"I'll see that it gets top priority. I want you to get back to Palm Beach as soon as you can."

As I was getting up to leave, Newell said, "Say, by the way, how's that health cult in Palm Beach — Suns-Rays Incorporated? Anything on that?"

Suns-Rays Incorporated was one of the chief reasons I was taking my vacation in Palm Beach, Fla., instead of in Sacramento, Calif., my home town. Carson Newell had heard about this crackpot religious group that

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was having a convention in Palm Beach, and he couldn't see why one of his reporters shouldn't combine business and pleasure.

And maybe that tells you a little more of the sort of person he is.

"It's a complete fraud," I told him. "They worship a glorified sunlamp and take regular treatments. Same time, they follow a strict diet and system of exercises—have their own little spot on one of the beaches. Guaranteed to cure what ails you."

"Who's the head?" Newell asked. "How many are there?"

"About twenty-five or thirty members, I'd say. That's not counting the few curiosity-seekers, like me. And nobody in particular seems to be in charge right now. I guess the big boss died, and they're holding this confab to elect a new one. Supposed to have the elections today, come to think of it. There's a great big scoop I missed."

"Any real news value in it?"

I shook my head. "Feature story, maybe, but it's pretty run-of-the-mill stuff, even at that."

"Well, stay with it," Newell said. "Just in case nothing pops on this telenosis deal. And get that defense mech as soon as possible."

"Do I get a real vacation after this is all over?" I asked, knowing what the answer would be.

"Scram," Newell replied. "I'm a busy man. Get going!"

LATE afternoon of the next day, my defense mechanism was ready. They had taken a reading of my brain wave with a makeshift electroencaphalograph, and then a couple of electronics boys had tinkered around until they had a gadget that would throw out vibrations on exactly my wave-band.

Of course, not having any telenosis equipment, we weren't able to make a real check of the contraption's effectiveness. I had to take the technologists' word that it would work.

Frankly, I didn't feel any too well defended as I hopped the five o'clock stratoliner back to Palm Beach.

The defense mech was enclosed in a black case that looked like a portable radio or a portable typewriter or a small suitcase. When you opened the lid, there was a flat surface having only one dial—for volume. The vibrations had a radius of about three-quarters of a mile.

It was after six when I got back to my hotel. I had Grogan's address, and he wasn't too far from where I was staying—but Grogan is not the sort of person on whom you make a business call after business hours.

My confidence in the defense

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mech hadn't grown, but I knew of another sure-fire defense, so after dinner I went to the bar to start setting it up.

But I lugged the thirty-pound portable along, anyway, wishing that it looked a little more like a briefcase instead of a typewriter or a radio.

Not that it really mattered, though. I could have carried an open bird cage with a live and screaming Calypsian *grimp,* odor and all, and still not have attracted any attention—because it wouldn't have been any more unusual than some of the guests at the hotel.

For a student of interplanetary biology, this would be a perfect observation post. There aren't many forms of extraterrestrial life that can accommodate themselves to Earth's conditions, but there are spots that go out of their way to provide suitable conditions for anything that comes along, and this was one of them.

IN THE two weeks I had been here, I had seen only one Calypsian dominant, and he didn't happen to have a *grimp* with him. But there were a pair of Uranian *galgaque* — squat, gray, midget honeymooners — who smelled just as bad. They left a few days after I got here.

Then there had been at least half a dozen flimsy, ethereal little Venusians at one time or another, dragging themselves around and looking unhappy as hell. None of them stayed more than a few days, and they spent most of their time in the water.

I noticed one or two hairy, apelike dominants from Jupiter's third moon, and a few of the snaky, scaly, six-limbed creatures from the second. In addition, there was a group of Vega VI dominants who were hard to distinguish from humans if you didn't look closely enough to notice their complete hairlessness and the absence of neck.

And of course there were the inevitable Martians—giant, big-chested, spindly-limbed, red-hued parodies of humanity; friendly, good-natured and alert. But I don't really suppose they should be classed among the oddities of the place.

As one of my colleagues commented in a national publication not long ago: "The only place a Martian is a novelty any more is on Mars."

I fully expect the 2080 census to show a Martian population on Earth more than double that of the home planet. So far, the Martians seem to be the only extraterrestrials who've really taken root here. And that's a problem, too.

But how the hell did I get off on that?

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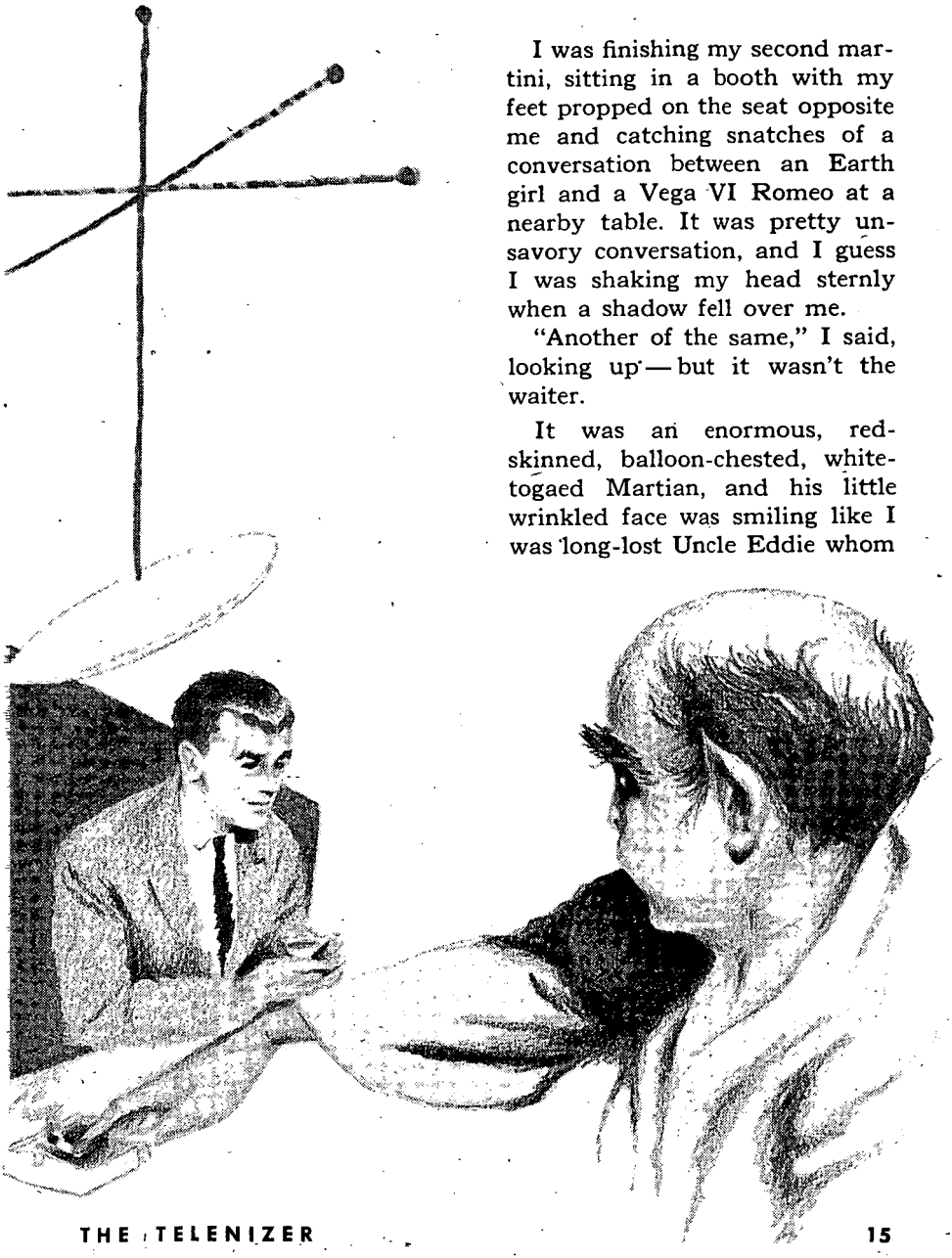
I was finishing my second martini, sitting in a booth with my feet propped on the seat opposite me and catching snatches of a conversation between an Earth girl and a Vega VI Romeo at a nearby table. It was pretty unsavory conversation, and I guess I was shaking my head sternly when a shadow fell over me.

"Another of the same," I said, looking up — but it wasn't the waiter.

It was an enormous, red-skinned, balloon-chested, white-togaed Martian, and his little wrinkled face was smiling like I was long-lost Uncle Eddie whom



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he hadn't seen for forty years. When he threw open his long, spindly arms and screeched a loud, "Ahh!" I was beginning to think maybe I was.

"Mr. Langston!" he shrilled. "How gladly to see you! Where been? We missing you colossal!" Then he slapped one fragile hand against his protruding chest, looked up at the ceiling and squeaked: "Clean living and Suns-Rays Incorporated!" He looked at me again, smiling.

"Huh?" I said. "Oh, yeah. Sure as hell. Clean living and Suns-Rays etcetera. Damn right. Pull up a chair, Blek, old boy."

AS FAR as I'm concerned, one Martian looks pretty much like another; but now I recognized this one. There was only one extraterrestrial in the little screwball health-cult with which I had become rather loosely acquainted in the past two weeks, and this was him.

I moved my feet and Zan Matl Blekeke sat down, exuding sunshine and clean living all over the place. We ordered drinks. He was elated as blazes about something, and I decided I might as well let him tell me about it — and knowing the typical Martian's haphazard use of the English language, I regarded the prospect as something of a challenge.

Zan Blekeke started right in telling me about it in his shrill, piping tones:

"Ah, Mr. Langston, wrong time go. Where been? Should have been meeting. I derelicted resident. Ha! Expected, yups?"

I replied, "Nups. Let's start over again. Something pretty damn important?"

He nodded.

"SRI meeting? Yesterday?"

He nodded again, smiling to beat hell.

I thought for a moment, then tried a shot in the dark, illogical as it was. "You lost your home? Derelicted resident?"

He looked like I'd stepped on his sore corn.

I tried again. "You don't mean you were kicked out of the group?"

He winced. "Oohhh, nooo! Opposition. Opposition."

"You mean there was too much opposition to your being kicked out, so you weren't?"

He slumped in his seat and regarded me balefully. With the pathos of a squeaky hinge, he said:

"Head man. Top dog. Derelicted resident. Boss. Wheel. Me. Zan Blekeke."

And if I didn't get it now, I just didn't deserve to know. But I got it.

"You were elected president?" I said.

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Zan Blekeke nodded gratefully. "Yus and so. Undeserving awful, but . . ." He heaved his chest in resignation.

"No. Not at all," I protested. "Why, I think that's wonderful. You're just the man for the job! Have another drink."

WE ordered more drinks, and the Martian continued: "Membership obviousless that whatsoever I closest intimute of Dear Late Doctor—" here he raised his eyes again and clapped a hand to his chest before he finished — "I should wallow in step-tracks."

"Why, absolutely," I agreed emphatically. "No question about it."

From talking to some of the SRI members after meetings or at beach sessions, I had gained the definite impression that Zan Blekeke had been a sort of a servant to "Dear Late Doctor," and would continue to be a servant to whoever was elected in his place.

But instead, they had elected the Martian himself. Logical, in a cockeyed way.

This was the first time I'd ever really talked to him. I'd seen him at the few meetings of SRI I had attended, but he had seemed pretty quiet there, letting others do most of the talking. He was in charge of administering the daily Sun-Ray treatments, which I had taken once or twice myself just for the experience; but on those occasions, he had been very cold and professional.

Closest intimute of Dear Late Doctor . . .

I had never been able to find out much about the Doctor. He was too sacred a subject for any of the members to even talk about. Of course, I hadn't tried very hard, because I wasn't especially interested in this assignment—I was supposed to be on vacation.

Now that a successor had been chosen, I wondered if the show was over and everyone could go home. I asked Blekeke about it.

"Not while yet," he replied. "Colonial could be. All live one. Dear Late Doctor—" hand to heart, face to Heaven, Amen—"often told wanted colossal."

It wasn't too clear, but I nodded anyway. Frankly, my interest in the whole thing was at a very low ebb. With the drinks and the effort of untangling Blekeke's twisted English, I was becoming listless and sleepy.

But he insisted on knowing where I had been when the meeting was held. I told him I'd had to hurry back to New York for a conference with my publisher.

He said, "Ah, yes. Writer." He pointed to the defense mech on the seat beside me. "That typer?"

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"Huh? Oh, no . . . that's a portable radio. Carry it around with me, in case the conversation gets dull." I was at the point where I didn't care much what I said.

He must have taken it as a gentle hint, because in a little while he got up and left, shrilling: "So gladly seeing you. Wanted know."

I nodded and waved a limp hand at him.

AS I was passing the desk on the way up to my room, the clerk called, "Mr. Langston, Mr. Langston. Long distance call for you, sir. I was just ringing your room. You can take it in a booth there, if you wish, sir."

I nodded and walked to the row of vp booths. Closing the door, I sat down in front of the screen and picked up the mike. The visiphone screen lighted and the speaker crackled. The chubby face and shoulders of Carson Newell took form and floated on the plate.

"Wanted to be sure you got the latest dope on Grogan before you see him," Newell said. "Just now got the report."

"Go ahead," I said.

"Well, then—" The boss looked up from his note pad. "About how long had the telenosis been on you? How many days?"

"H'm. Don't know. It's hard to tell, if it's handled right. Weird nightmares, daydreams, absent-mindedness, sudden impulses, optical illusions—it can be telenosis, and it can be just you. I'd say three or four days, but—"

"Wouldn't necessarily prove anything, anyway," Newell broke in. "Here's the report on Grogan. Been out of Corrective for a little more than a month now. Went directly to Memphis. Cleared up business affairs there, then went to Palm Beach for vacation. Arrived late Tuesday afternoon—four days ago. Took a suite in Space Verge hotel with four quote secretaries unquote, and has refused to see anyone. No unusually large baggage. No unusual activities reported. So much for that."

He turned a page of the note pad and went on: "Corrective Institute record: responded favorably to treatment. Occupational training in administrative accounting. Special courses in business and political ethics. Now get this—it's the one thing that gives your hunch any credibility at all. Three months intermittent telenosis therapy for slight paranoiac tendencies. Response favorable. Dismissed from C.I. after five years, three weeks and six days. Classification: Apparent cure, but possibility of relapse."

We were both quiet for a while, looking at each other.

Then I said, "Well, I'll see him

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tomorrow. Remember, it's nothing but a hunch—not even that."

"Be careful, dammit," Newell cautioned.

. . . I woke up sometime in the early morning, before it was light, with a clicking noise in my ears. I lay there in bed, gazing into the darkness, wondering, yet knowing, what would happen if the defense mech should break down—if a tube should give out, or if some little coil should prove defective.

The clicking stopped after a while, but it was a long time before I got back to sleep.

I HAD no trouble getting an interview with Grogan. I'd known I wouldn't. It was a simple matter of calling his suite and telling the loose-mouthed, scar-cheeked "secretary" who answered that Earl Langston would like to make an appointment with Isaac Grogan for, say, 10:30.

"Grogan ain't seein' nobody," the secretary growled.

"Ask him," I said.

The face vanished and reappeared on the screen a few moments later. "Okay. Come up anytime you're ready."

"Fifteen minutes," I said, and replaced the mike.

I turned up the volume of the defense mech as high as it would go, and left it in my room when I left.

The same hideous secretary, with the loose jowels and the deep, livid scar on his right cheek, met me at the door of Grogan's suite.

"Th' boss'll see you in th' library," the bodyguard rumbled, and led me to the room. The door closed, but did not click behind me.

Isaac Grogan was slouched on a sofa, hands in his pockets, looking at the floor.

I stood for a moment, looking at him.

He had changed only a little in five years. He was a big man with a broad, pleasant face and thick black hair. A deep dimple divided his chin. The last time I'd seen him, he had been getting a little paunchy, and there had been wrinkles developing in his neck and bags under his eyes. But that had been from strain and worry, and he looked a lot better now.

"You're looking well," I told him.

"What the hell do you want?" Grogan said quietly. "Why can't you leave me alone? I don't want any trouble."

"Neither do I."

And suddenly I felt very awkward. What the hell *did* I want? Just exactly what had I expected to accomplish with this visit? I didn't really know.

I cleared my throat. "I've got

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one question, Grogan. Maybe two. Then I'll leave."

He looked at me.

"Do you still blame me for what happened in Memphis?" I asked.

Grogan shifted his position and gave a sort of half-laugh. "Langston, I've never liked you, and I don't now. But I can't say that I blame you for the Memphis mess—if I ever did. Now, what's your other question?"

"Telenosis," I said.

He waited, looking straight at me. "Well? What about it?"

"According to your C.I. record," I said, "you had three months of intermittent telenosis therapy."

He shruggged. "That's right. Lots of people do. You still haven't asked your question."

"Yes, I have," I replied. "I'll leave now. Thanks for your time."

THE gorilla-secretary was opening the front door for me, when Grogan spoke again. "Langston."

I turned around.

Grogan was standing in the door of the library.

"Langston," he repeated. "I don't know what your angle is. I don't know why you came here, or whether you got what you wanted. Furthermore, I don't care much. Five years ago is not today, Langston. I've changed. Just the same, I don't believe I want to see you again. I don't like you. Okay?"

I said, "Okay," and left.

Back in my hotel room, I first turned down the volume of the defense mech, then sat down at the visiphone and put in a call to New York. The pudgy image of Carson Newell appeared.

"I'm stumped," I told him.

"What's the matter? Did you see Grogan?"

"Yeah. Just now."

"Well?"

"Nothing. I'm stumped. He's completely changed. If there was ever a case of full and complete correction, I'd say Grogan is it."

Newell tapped his fingertips together, then shrugged impatiently. "Well, hell, I don't think we're getting anywhere on this. I'll turn it over to the C.I.D. and let them worry about it."

"So what happens now?" I asked. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Take a vacation. But hang on to that defense mech. Stay in Palm Beach and contact me pronto if anything happens. Buzz me at least once a day, even if anything doesn't happen."

He started to put down the mike, then lifted it again. "How's the SRI?"

"Oh, that. I'll whip out a story on it in a couple of days."

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"No hurry. Find out all you can about it. Give you something to do while you're waiting around."

He put down the mike and faded from the screen.

SO I promptly did my damnedest to forget all about Isaac Grogan and telenosis. I spent the rest of the day at the beach, sprawled out on the hot sand with the defense mech beside me and an army of people—humans and aliens—surrounding me. Only once, at about four o'clock, did the defense mech start going *click-click-click*. I timed it. It lasted three minutes and then quit.

When I got back to the hotel, at about five, a man fell into step with me as soon as I entered the lobby.

"Name's Maxwell," he told me. "C.I.D. I'm one of your bodyguards for a while."

"How many others do I rate?" I asked.

He was a tall, heavily built young man in his middle twenties. He carried a briefcase. We headed for the elevator.

"Only one," he replied, "but he'll stay pretty much out of sight. He'll join us in your room after a while. We have to ask you a lot of questions."

The other bodyguard, who slipped into my room without knocking twenty minutes later, was shorter, thinner and older. He was bald except for a gray fringe, and his name was Johnson.

The C.I.D. men spent a half-hour checking for hidden mikes and cameras before they said much of anything. Then they plopped down on the edge of the bed, and the young man opened his briefcase.

The older one said, "Have your dinner sent up here. We'll get started on some of these questions right away."

The questions were both exhaustive and exhausting. The older man, Johnson, fired the questions, and Maxwell wrote down the answers, occasionally inserting an inquiry of his own. They wanted to know everything —not only about my telenosis experiences and my knowledge of and contacts with Isaac Grogan, but everything I had done, said or thought during the past two weeks, everyone I had met and talked to, and everything we had talked about.

At the end of three and a half hours, I felt completely pumped out, and Maxwell had a sheaf of notes the size of a best-seller.

Johnson said, "Well, I guess that'll do for a starter. We'll have another session tomorrow."

He took the notes from Maxwell and put them in Maxwell's

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briefcase. He stood up. "I'll have these transcribed and maybe check around a little. I'll meet you here at six-thirty tomorrow night."

"What about—" I started. He cut me off: "Maxwell will stay with you. He's not to let you out of his sight. In case anyone asks, he's your brother-in-law from Sacramento."

I COULDN'T help laughing—but it was an admiring laugh. "You fellows are nothing if not thorough. Does my real brother-in-law, John Maxwell of Sacramento, know about this?" I was curious.

It was Maxwell who answered. "Your brother-in-law received a long-distance emergency call from you at noon today, telling him to join you immediately. Vision-reception was fuzzy, but he recognized your voice and took the first strato. I changed places with him in Denver, where I happened to be stationed, and he was smuggled back home. He's with his family, but he'll have to stay in for a few days."

I shook my head. "It's marvelous. Thoroughness personified. Say, I'll bet you fellows even thought of getting defense mechanisms . . . but where are they?"

Johnson and Maxwell looked at each other, jaws hanging.

"Well, I'll be damned!" Johnson said bitterly. "Thoroughness personified! Son of a . . ." He slapped his hat on his bald head and dashed out the door without looking back.

Maxwell grimaced. He got up from the bed and walked to an easy chair and sat down again. "Well, Irvin Johnson will take care of *that* little detail. But it's going to take time . . ."

"It would have taken time anyway—a day or so—even if you'd thought of it first thing," I said. "Besides, there's no danger until they find your wave-band, and that takes time, too."

But he remained disconsolate. Not because of the danger, but simply because they'd overlooked an angle. Under a system in which the agents are given maximum responsibility for details and planning, that would count heavily against them on their records. I almost felt guilty for reminding them.

I said, "John, look—if all else fails, there's one sure quick defense. Alcohol. I would say that under the circumstances, since you're supposed to be protecting *me,* we should keep *you* as well defended as possible."

"M'm?"

"You do drink, don't you?" I asked.

"Like a fish," Maxwell said, lunging to his feet.

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WHEN we were back in the room, Maxwell said: "Hell, I don't see that telenoshis is such a damn menash to society, if all you have to do is get drunk."

"You want a nation of alcoholics?" I said. I sat down on the bed and untied my shoes. "Anyway, whasha difference? D. T. horrors or 'noshis horrors? Whash worse?"

Maxwell grunted.

We both had to sleep in the same bed, and Maxwell was a restless sleeper. I had finally crept into the lower depths of slumber, where it was warm and snug, when he poked me sharply in the ribs.

"What's that?" he demanded. He was sitting up.

"What's what?"

"Listen!"

I heard it. *Click-click-click* . . .

"What time is it?" I asked. My eyes were still closed, and I was damned if I was going to open them.

"Three fifty-seven. But what is—"

"Defense mech," I said. "Right on time. Every twelve hours. Tries to get me. Now go sleep."

I rolled over and shut my eyes even tighter—but I couldn't get all the way back to sleep. Not back down to the warm, dark depths. It was a long time before Maxwell even lay back down, and he rolled and twisted for the rest of the night. At six o'clock, he fell into a deep, quiet slumber, and I was wide awake, damn him. So I got up and dressed.

I found a news magazine I hadn't read, and occupied myself with it for an hour. Practically the entire issue was devoted to an analysis of the Martian immigration.

It went way back into history and discussed the folklore fear that humans had for centuries about a Martian invasion. And it pointed out that something very like a Martian invasion was taking place right now. One particular article concluded with what I considered an unnecessarily grim warning that unless something were done soon to check the flow of immigrants, Earth would soon be overrun with Martians.

Other articles in the magazine went into the causes and implications of the migration. One of the writers pointed out that Mars is a dying planet. In only a few thousand years, it will be too cold, too dry and too airless to support life.

The development of interplanetary travel a century earlier had provided the inhabitants with a means of escape. They could survive on Earth; now they could get to Earth; so they came to Earth.

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One full article was devoted to the debates and pending legislation in World Council on the subject, but I didn't take the time to read it. I was fairly familiar with the current controversy, having followed the daily news reports, and besides, the reading was giving me a headache.

AT seven o'clock, I considered going down for breakfast, but it occurred to me that it would be another black mark against Maxwell if I should be seen without him. Forgetting about the defense mech was enough for one case.

So I ordered breakfast brought up to the room. While I was waiting, and since I was sitting near it anyway, I flicked the TV switch and tuned in on the morning's news. Nothing earthshaking: a factory explosion in St. Louis; political unrest in India; death of a Vegan millionaire; speech in The World Council by Delegate Machavowski of Eurasia in support of the Bagley-Dalton bill to establish a yearly immigration quota of ten thousand from all planets, one thousand from Mars; protest reply by a Martian sociologist at Yale; spacecruiser crashed on Calypso, twenty killed. And so on and so on.

My attention was held momentarily by the Martian question, since I was freshly informed on it.

While the two views of the issue did nothing to settle it in my mind, they did serve to remind me of my Martian friend, Zan Matl Blekeke, and the fact that I was supposed to be digging up a feature story on Suns-Rays Incorporated.

"What's on the agenda for today?" my pseudo-brother-in-law asked as I was finishing my coffee a half-hour later. He rolled out of bed, yawned and scratched his head vigorously. His hair was rumpled, but he looked rested, and I envied him to beat hell.

"You mean it's up to me?" I asked.

"Sure. You just go on with your normal everyday existence and ignore me, like I'm nothing but a shadow." He was still stretching lazily.

"Well, for the first thing, I'm going to see that we get a cot in here. There isn't room in that bed for both of us."

Maxwell grinned as he buttoned his shirt. "D'I kick you out of bed? Sorry. Should have warned you."

"Do you eat breakfast?" I asked him.

"Hell, yes. Like a wolf."

"Well, let's go down and get you some breakfast while I figure out my agenda for today."

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I WASN'T sure what I wanted to do—start working on that SRI feature, I supposed, so I could get it out of the way and either relax or concentrate on this telenosis business, which I was supposed to be forgetting about. I had most of the dope I needed for the story—atmosphere, first hand experience. . .

Everything, it occurred to me, but the essential facts.

For instance, I would need to know more about Zan Blekeke himself — simple biographical data that shouldn't take too long to gather. A harder job would be finding out about "Dear Late Doctor." So far I didn't even know what his name was. And if none of the SRI members would talk about him. . .

As Maxwell and I sat at a breakfast room table, I made a mental checklist of the points I would have to work on. I was staring out the window at the flowers staging a color-riot in the garden, when suddenly Maxwell said:

"Say, Earl, about how long does it take to find out a guy's brain wave band?"

"Huh? What do you mean?" I looked at him. He was shoveling pancakes into his mouth like a fireman stoking a furnace.

He shrugged and swallowed. "You said there was no danger from telenosis until they found my wave band. Well, last night I had the damnedest nightmares, and I was just wondering—"

"Relax," I said. "Ever been telenized?"

"Not that I know of."

"Got nothin' to worry about, then. If you had been telenized, it's just possible they could have gotten your band number from the Telenosis Bureau. Which, by God, come to think of it, is where they probably got mine. But without that, or an electro-encaphalograph, it'd take weeks, at least."

"But can't it influence a lot of people at once? I mean, like mass hypnosis?"

"Sure be hell if it could," I said. "But I don't think it can. I don't know why not, but I definitely remember old Doc Reighardt saying it'd never been done."

He seemed to feel better. He finished his breakfast in relative silence. I was able to map out a general procedure for gathering all of the necessary SRI information.

First step was to get hold of Zan Blekeke again and have him tell me his life history. I shuddered at the prospect, but it had to be done.

"We're going to East Emerson beach," I told John Maxwell.

On the way, aboard a third-level bus, I asked him, "SRI

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ever been investigated by you people?"

"Damn if I know. Why?"

"Never mind. Save me a lot of trouble, maybe, if it had. Just a thought."

We found the SRI cultists at their usual place on the beach. It was a stretch on the far south end, a rough, gravelly portion quite a bit beyond the army of regular bathers.

As we approached, threading our way through the maze of umbrellas, tablecloths and people, people, people in practically all stages of nudity, I noticed that a makeshift rope fence enclosed the little group of SRIs where they were sprawled out doing their relaxing exercises. That was something new — the fence, I mean.

I started to crawl through the ropes, and one of the nearby recliners jumped to his feet, stood in front of me and made pushing motions with his hands.

"I'm sorry, sirs, but this is a meeting of The Suns-Rays Incorporated religious group. You are requested not to enter."

Now, he knew better than to say a silly thing like that to me. His name was Monte Bingham, and he knew damn well who I was, and I told him so. "I'm practically an ex-officio member in good standing myself," I said. "Wake up, you goof."

Monte Bingham turned slowly around and looked toward the big Martian, Zan Blekeke, who was sitting up with his spindly legs outstretched near the center of the enclosure.

Blekeke got to his feet and waddled toward us, waving Bingham aside. He was not smiling. He stood glaring at us.

"Whose?" he said with a swift, half-gesture toward Maxwell.

"Whose?" I repeated. "He's mine. I mean, he's my brother-in-law, John Maxwell, come to visit me from Sacramento. He's okay. What's going on? I just wanted to make an appointment to talk with you."

Blekeke heaved his big round bare chest. "Trying still disciple in," he replied.

"How's that? Discipline, you mean?"

"Yups. Laters out. Strangers out. No excepting. Can't."

"Yeah, but you know me, and John here—"

"Brother law oaks, but both laters. See hall hour halfish. Talk then. Treatment, yups?"

I said, "Well, I guess that'll be okay. Hour and a half, at the hall, huh?"

Blekeke said, "Yups," and turned away.

HE took two steps and stopped. I saw his spine stiffen. His head turned slowly toward

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the water's edge where two dogs were running circles around each other, not far from the enclosure. As the dogs moved, Blekeke's head moved with them, back and forth and back again. . .

Suddenly one of the dogs, the smaller one—a black and white spaniel with flapping ears—turned and raced through the SRI compound, bounding gracelessly over the sprawled bodies of SRI members. The larger German shepherd gave two woofs and leaped playfully in pursuit. They passed within about ten feet of Blekeke.

When the German shepherd barked, I heard a thin, drawn-out squeak, like a mouse with his tail caught in a trap, come from Blekeke. He turned around with incredible speed and took a half-step in our direction. His face was distorted as though in pain, and for an instant I thought he had stepped on a jagged piece of glass or something.

But then I recognized the expression on his face. It was not pain.

It was terror.

I noticed now that he was trembling violently. He twirled again and started in the opposite direction, stopped and turned swiftly around once more. He acted as though he were surrounded on all sides by invisible Martian-eaters.

The dogs paused at the edge of the enclosure for a moment to stand on their hind legs and exchange playful blows; then they raced off together toward the more densely populated beach area.

Blekeke's face suddenly relaxed, and with a final shudder he controlled the trembling.

He was muttering: "Doggie, doggie, doggie," when he lowered his eyes to us, and he gave a little start as if he hadn't known we were standing there.

"Hall. Hour halfish," he said after a moment's pause. Then he turned and walked rapidly back into the midst of the prostrate SRI members and lay down.

Maxwell and I exchanged glances and walked away. I felt, all of a sudden, rather sad and depressed. When we had gone a respectable distance, I said, "Poor devil! Fear of dogs. It must be awful."

"Fear of dogs? Cynophobia? You think that's what it was?"

"Well, sure," I replied. "Only thing it could be."

Maxwell said, "First case I've ever seen of it."

"Me, too."

IT was still not quite ten o'clock. We killed the next hour and a half basking in the Sun and taking occasional dips in the water. We had to go one

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at a time, because one of us had to stay and guard the defense mech.

At 11:30 we kept our appointment with Blekeke. He was alone in the SRI hall, a long, low, metal building located a half-mile down the beach from the general bathing area.

THE hall had once been a storage warehouse of some kind —I have no idea what kind. But that had been a long time ago; and it was now used exclusively for SRI meetings.

There was another building near it, the ramshackle, rambling mansion of a long-dead millionaire, which had been appropriated by the SRI as housing quarters for the members who did not care to stay in rooms or hotels in town. And most of them didn't.

Maxwell was interested in the house, but I couldn't tell him anything about it. I had never been in it, whereas I had been in the hall several times. Of course, there was nothing much to explain about the hall—it was practically bare.

The Sun Ray stood like an altar at one end. About thirty-five folding chairs were lined up in rows facing the Ray. That was all.

Blekeke was doing something to the lamp part of the Ray when we came in—tightening the bulb, apparently. It was a very simple contraption. Nothing but a padded, white-sheeted reclining table suspended over the full length of which was the lamp. The thing was operated by a bank of controls wired up a few feet away from the table.

"Infra-red heat lamp," Maxwell whispered.

"Sure," I said. "But don't say so."

Blekeke saw us and jumped down from the platform and greeted us with open arms, apologizing for his rude behavior on the beach.

I told him to forget about it; that I just wanted to ask him a few questions so I could write up my story about SRI—give him a little free publicity.

Blekeke beamed. Said he'd be glad to help all he could.

But before I had a chance to ask any questions, he was blabbering: "Give treatment. New, improve. Much healthier. Give try." And he was pushing us toward the machine.

I was not the least bit interested in taking a treatment, and I tried to tell him so, as kindly as I could. But he was insistent.

Finally we agreed to take the treatment, hoping he would get it out of his system. I handed the defense mech to Maxwell and lay down. Couldn't tell a damn

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bit of difference. Ten minutes of warmth and dozy relaxation, and that's it. You don't feel a bit different after it's over than you did before.

Unless you're a good cultist, and convince yourself by auto-suggestion that all your bodily ills have been miraculously—if temporarily—baked out.

After Maxwell had been given the treatment, I tried again to get Blekeke pinned down to answering some of my questions, but it was no good.

He was obliging, cooperative and friendly as hell, but his heart just wasn't in it. He had to tell us about the improvements in the Ray, and when I threw specific questions at him, he always managed to answer with some reference to the Ray and start all over again—and it was all pure gibberish.

I gave up. We parted with mutual benedictions, and John Maxwell and I walked away, toward the one-track road leading to the old mansion.

"What do *you* do in a situation like this?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "Try somebody else."

We walked up the front steps of the mansion, and I punched the doorbell.

It was no go there, either. The cultist who opened the door, whom I remembered as a shoe salesman from Boise, informed us firmly and none too politely that no one could enter without the explicit and written permission of President Matl Blekeke He showed no sign of recognizing me. He slammed the door.

I gave emphatic utterance to an unprintable word and said, "Let's go back to town."

JOHNSON showed up in the room promptly at six-thirty, as he had promised, again slipping in without knocking. He threw his briefcase and his hat on the bed and pulled up a chair to the cardtable where Maxwell and I were playing chess.

"How about the defense mechs?" Maxwell asked.

"Hospital in New York is working on 'em," Johnson said. "Promised they'd have 'em ready tomorrow morning. I'm going up tonight, after I get through here, so I can pick 'em up right away."

"Quick work," I said.

"Any new developments on this end? I've been too busy today getting things organized to keep an eye on you."

"Every twelve hours Langston's defense mech starts clicking," Maxwell said. "Four o'clock this morning and four o'clock this afternoon."

"So he's not giving up on you, anyway," Johnson said. "We know he's still around. What

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else? Anything new come up?"

I shrugged. "Spent the whole day on a wild goose chase—from my point of view. Trying to dig up information for my feature about Suns-Rays Incorporated."

Johnson nodded. "No luck, huh?"

I told him about the so-called interview with Blekeke that morning, and how in the afternoon I had tried to contact those SRI members who I knew had been living in town. That had been futile, too; all of them had moved to the house on the beach. Then Maxwell and I had spent a couple of hours in the library, checking reference books for some mention of SRI or any of its members. With no results.

Johnson recognized the frustration in my voice. "Don't let it get you down," he said.

I asked him if the C.I.D. had ever investigated the cult.

"Not yet," he said. "Not that I know of. But everyone that you've had any contact with since you've been here is being checked thoroughly. And since that includes the SRI cult, it'll get a very complete going-over."

I said, "Well, shucks, then. All I have to do is sit back and let you fellows dig up the information I need."

"That, of course, depends on how the information is classified after it's processed," Johnson corrected. "Maybe you can use it and maybe you can't." He shrugged. "Well, I've got a whole new batch of questions here for you. That's my job right now. Let's get at 'em."

AFTER Johnson was gone and I again felt mentally empty, I turned to Maxwell, who was pacing the floor restlessly: "Well, shall we go down and set up your defense barrier again?"

"Let's take a walk," he said. "I've got a headache. Fresh air might help."

"Suits me," I replied. "I know of a little bar seven or eight blocks from here . . ."

I stopped because he was already going out the door, and I had to get up from the chair, grab the defense mech and run after him.

He wasn't hurrying, just walking casually, but not waiting for anything.

In the elevator, on the way down, he said, "Those defense mechs. God damn. I wish those defense mechs . . ."

I nudged him. The elevator operator was looking at him closely, and there's no use taking any chances. He ought to know better.

He was out of the elevator as soon as the door opened at ground level. He walked toward the front entrance. I had to run

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again to catch up with him.

"Hey, what's the hurry?" I asked. "Can I come along too?"

He didn't answer, just kept walking. Looking straight ahead, still not hurrying, but moving rapidly nevertheless. When we got outside, he turned right and continued at the same steady pace.

I tugged at his arm. "Hey, the bar I mentioned is the other way."

He shook my hand loose and kept walking. "I want to go this way."

I shrugged and trotted to keep up with him. "Okay. If you know of a better place, we'll go there. But—"

"This damn headache," he said. "I've had it all day. All afternoon."

"My fault," I said. "I started you puzzling over a problem that concerns only me. . ."

He wasn't listening.

There were few pedestrians on this level of traffic; most people who walked places took the ambulators on the second level. Down here the sidewalks were narrow and the curbs high, the streets being used almost exclusively for heavy transfer and delivery trucks.

A high metal railing along the street-side of the walk prevented careless pedestrians from stepping in the path of the huge, swift, rumbling vehicles.

But there were no railings at the intersections.

And at the next intersection, Maxwell stepped off the curb, shifted his course just a fraction, and went on at a tangent that would have had him smack in the middle of a truck-traffic lane.

I GRABBED his arm and pulled hard, to get him headed back in the right direction.

"What the hell are you trying to do—get yourself killed?"

Which was almost exactly what I'd started to say. But he was the one who said it.

So I just said, "*Huh?*"

He jerked his arm free and continued walking—straight toward an oncoming 100-ton semi.

I had a sudden idea of what was going on, and acted rapidly.

I set the defense mech down, because you can't handle a man Maxwell's size with only one hand. I grabbed his arm again, this time with both hands, and pulled as hard as I could. It jerked him off balance and out of danger. The semi roared past.

And Maxwell turned on me with sudden, violent anger.

"Listen," he snapped, "what in hell's the matter with you? What do you think you're doing?"

I didn't argue with him. I took careful aim and threw a

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haymaker, giving it everything I had. It caught the point of his chin squarely and jarred me to my ankle.

He swayed a little bit and his face went blank, but he didn't fall.

For which I shall be eternally grateful.

Another giant semi, still nearly a block away, was hurtling toward us. If Maxwell had fallen, I could not possibly have dragged him out of the way in time. And the semi couldn't have stopped in that distance.

As it was, I was able to snatch up the defense mech with one hand and propel Maxwell to the opposite curb, just seconds before the truck went by with a whiz and a rattle.

I got Maxwell onto an escalator leading to the second level before his legs buckled. Then he went to his knees. I managed to get his arm around my shoulder and hoist him back to his feet before we reached the top.

On the second level there were no vehicles; quite a few pedestrians glided by in both directions, on several different speeds of ambulator bands.

I spotted a bar down the street and dragged Maxwell onto a amband going that way.

By the time I got him inside and settled in a booth, he was beginning to recover, shaking his head and muttering to himself.

I ordered a whole bottle of Scotch and handed Maxwell a glass of the stuff. He took it automatically and drank half of it as though it were water.

HE put the glass down quickly and half rose from his seat, clutching his throat and gasping. I handed him another glass, this one containing water. He drank it and sat back down, slowly.

"Drink the rest of that Scotch," I said. "Drink it quick and don't ask any questions. Someone's got a telenosis beam on you, and he isn't kidding."

It penetrated, for he emptied the glass with short but rapid gulps. I filled the glass again and ordered more water. It took him fifteen minutes to kill the glass this time, taking only a little sip of Scotch for every deep gulp of water. But he got it down, though he was nearly unconscious at the end.

"Listen," I said, reaching over to shake his limp shoulder. "Are you still with me? For the love of heaven, don't pass out on me— that's about the worst thing you could do. John!"

He jerked his head and regarded me with unfocused eyes. "Huh? Wash matter, ole fren? I'm wish ya. Wish ya ta the end. Washer trouble, huh?"

I said, "John, listen. You're

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in danger. We've got to get you out of here. Out of town. Back to New York. Right away! Do you understand?"

He nodded limply. I wasn't sure whether he really understood or not. But if he could only walk, it wouldn't make much difference.

If only he didn't pass out . . . it wasn't very far. Just back to the door, then into the elevator instead of going onto the street at this level. Then, on the third level, only the few feet necessary to catch a bus or a cab to take us to the strato-port.

If he *couldn't* walk, I didn't know what I'd do. Whoever the telenosis operator was, I was sure he had followed us to this bar through Maxwell's mind, That's the way telenosis works. Alcohol sets up a complete barrier, and contact is broken entirely; but about all a blow on the head does is immobilize the victim—visions, commands and other impressions can still penetrate, and the operator can still receive whatever sensations his victim may have.

Maxwell hadn't been unconscious enough for us to be safe. Someone wanted our blood. We had to move fast.

And if he couldn't manage to walk at all . . .

He couldn't, exactly. But he could get to his feet and lurch and stumble along after a fashion.

It accomplished the same purpose.

I got him to the third level, and we stood at the entrance of the bar while I got myself oriented.

I had made a tactical error. Vehicles going to the strato-port stopped on the other side of the street. And to get there, I would now have to walk Maxwell all the way down to the end of the block to a pedestrian cross-walk, then halfway back up the other side.

The alternative was to go down again and cross in the middle of the block on the pedestrian level, which is what I should have done in the first place.

But I wanted to get as far away from the bar as possible and as soon as possible. So I shrugged and turned to my left, shoving and dragging Maxwell with me.

As I did so, my defense mech started clicking.

Maxwell stumbled and nearly fell. I shoved him against the side of a building and leaned against him to keep him up. The liquor had hit him hard. If he once went down, there would be no getting him up. Not by me.

We did better after I wrapped one of his arms around my shoulder. I could carry part of

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his weight and I had better control of him. I kept him as close to the storefronts as possible, to minimize the possibility of being recognized from a moving vehicle in the street.

It didn't do a bit of good.

They'd probably spotted us as soon as we stepped away from the bar entrance. For all I know, they had been waiting for us since we entered the bar.

Three of them. Sitting there in the illegally parked light passenger sedan just ahead of us.

I saw it when we were still fifteen feet away. I saw it, and I knew what it was, and I stopped.

The sedan wasn't really parked. It was just pulled over close against the curb, moving slowly toward us.

When I stopped, the sedan moved up quickly even with us, and two men stepped out.

I edged Maxwell toward a drugstore entrance a few feet to the left, but the men from the sedan were at our side in an instant.

"Hey, friend, got a match?" one of them asked for the benefit of a passing couple who glanced at us.

I recognized him. A deep criss-crossed scar ran from above his right cheekbone vertically down his cheek, ending in a big dent in his jaw bone. His lips were thick and loose.

FOR just an instant I was motionless, frozen, my right hand holding Maxwell's arm over my shoulder, my left hand gripping the quietly ticking defense mech.

Then I moved almost without thinking about it.

I released my grip on Maxwell's arm, shoving him against the thug that I didn't recognize. At the same time, I swung my defense mech, aiming at the head of my scarfaced acquaintance. He raised his arm, but the heavy case slammed into it and bounced off his forehead.

It probably broke his arm, and possibly fractured his skull. I didn't wait to find out.

Holding tightly to the defense mech, I darted into the store entrance. I left Maxwell blindly clutching the assailant into whose path I had thrown him. I didn't worry about Maxwell. They could have him. If I got away, they wouldn't dare kill him. And if I didn't get away, they would kill both of us.

The escalator was just inside the door to the right, and I ran down the downward-moving steps, doubling back to the left at the bottom, and out the door on the pedestrian level. I turned left again and ran to the corner, crossed the street and ran three-fourths the length of the block.

I glanced backward and didn't see anyone running after

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me, so I entered a late-hour department store. I wasn't safe yet, and I didn't feel safe, but I felt encouraged enough to slow down to a fast walk through the aisles of the men's clothing section.

I had to get to a visiphone, first of all, and call Newell in New York. And then—well, I wasn't sure. Hide, somewhere. Keep from being captured.

It took me three minutes of rapid wandering through the building to find a row of visiphone booths. I placed the call. While I waited, nervously crossing and uncrossing my legs, peering intermittently out the window to see if there was any sign of pursuit, I had time to think.

I had time to think, but I didn't think. Not really. I was thinking of what I was going to tell Newell. Thinking of Maxwell being dragged away by Grogan's "secretaries," and wondering what would happen to him. But I didn't really think, and maybe it's just as well.

A little less than nine agonizing minutes elapsed before Newell's plump face appeared on the screen.

"You're late tonight," he said. "I was just on the verge of calling you. How're things going?"

I told him quickly, and with a minimum of detail, what had happened since our last session.

"It's Grogan, after all," I said. "I'd recognize that scarfaced gorilla of his anywhere. Get Grogan and—"

The boss nodded. "We'll get him. You let me worry about that. You've got to . . . You say they were beaming telenosis on Maxwell? How the devil did they get his wave-band so soon?"

"You can worry about that one, too," I told him.

"Okay. Never mind. Where are you now? Never mind that either. Just stay there. Call the nearest police station and have them send someone after you. Get in a nice snug cell and stay put. We'll take care of Grogan and Maxwell. Okay, now. Don't waste any time."

WE hung up together. Then I quickly dialed the operator and asked for the nearest sectional police station.

When the face of the desk sergeant flashed on the screen, I told him, "My name is Earl Langston. My life is in immediate danger. I'm in a vp booth near the Pacific Street entrance, number four, of Underhill's department store, second level."

"Stay where you are," the sergeant replied. "We'll have someone after you in ten or fifteen minutes."

In a surprisingly short time,

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an overweight, gray-uniformed policeman with a face like a bulldog rapped at the door of the booth.

I stood up and opened the door.

"Earl Langston?" he asked. I nodded and followed him to an elevator. We went up to the third level and then through a maze of aisles and departments before going out a door that opened on a parking lot.

The policeman led me to an unmarked auto and opened the back door for me. Two dogs barked at my heels as we walked to the vehicle. I shooed them off before I closed the door.

I leaned back on the soft cushions with a sigh and set the heavy defense mech on the edge of the seat beside me, still holding the handle loosely with one hand.

The motor purred as we moved slowly out of the parking lot and into the street.

I paid no attention to where we were going. Just breathed another sigh and closed my eyes. At last, I could begin to relax. In just a few minutes, now, I'd be safe. I hadn't realized how tense I was. My neck muscles ached and my stomach slipped slowly from my chest cavity back down to where it belonged.

It seemed a long time ago that I had abandoned Maxwell to Grogan's thugs . . . What had happened to him since then? How long ago had it been? Only half an hour? Not much longer, anyway.

Now again I had time to think, and this time I did think. I began to ask myself questions—to wonder about certain things.

How had Grogan learned Maxwell's wave-band so soon?

What was Grogan doing with a telenizer in the first place, and what was he up to? Just personal revenge against me?

How did I know for sure that it *was* Grogan?

That question startled me. I opened my eyes and sat up straight. In moving so suddenly, my hand knocked over the defense mech and it thudded to the floor. As I bent quickly to pick it up, it started clicking again.

Several things occurred to me at once, then, and my stomach wadded itself into a tight ball and shot up again to press against my heart. My neck and back muscles tightened.

THE first thing that struck me, I think, was that the defense mech had started clicking *again*. It had been clicking before. . . As Maxwell and I left the bar, the defense mech had begun clicking steadily. Then—sometime—it had stopped. Probably when I hit Scarface with it. But

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I hadn't noticed. And for thirty minutes — closer to forty-five, now . . .

There was no particular sequence to the flood of realizations that rushed my consciousness next and left me feeling weak and shaky.

The desk sergeant had said ten minutes. The policeman had gotten there in less than five. We were driving, not through side streets toward a police station, but along a high-speed lane of a main thoroughfare, away from the city. Two dogs had yapped at my heels. The "police" vehicle was unmarked—unusual if not illegal.

When I looked at the driver, he was not, of course, a policeman.

He was one of Grogan's bodyguards—the one into whose arms I had thrown Maxwell not long ago.

He was staring straight ahead at the road, his spread-nosed face composed. He hadn't noticed anything.

I took a deep breath and leaned back again, half-closing my eyes. But I did not relax. The clicking of the defense mech seemed thunderous to me, but if the driver heard it, he gave no indication. Perhaps it would have meant nothing to him if he did hear it.

I tried to think of the problem at hand, but my mind refused to cooperate. It kept rushing back to events of the recent past and demanding reasons and explanations.

When the defense mech faltered and quietly stopped clicking, I was aware of it this time. My first impulse was to hit it with my hand and try to make it work again, but I restrained myself.

I controlled my thoughts firmly, holding them tight and shaping them carefully in my mind before letting them go.

The driver was again a policeman in the gray police uniform. We were once more driving slowly through city streets instead of speeding along a highway. Two dogs ran beside the auto, barking—the same two dogs that I had shooed before I closed the door.

I formed my thoughts: *I know who you are. It's no secret any more. But why? What are you trying to do?*

There was no reply.

It could mean one of two things. Either he simply didn't want to answer, or else he wasn't on the machine in person but was playing an impression-tape on my wave-band. I tried again.

You're licked, you know. Already you're licked. Even if my call to Newell was nothing but a telenosis dream—even if no one

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knows anything about this but me, you're still licked—

NO reply. None of any kind. I'd expected at least to get a sinister chuckle, or a flood of horrors. But there was nothing more nor less than what there had been—the policeman driving through quiet city streets, and the dogs barking.

Then it was just a recording, prepared in advance. My mind was not being followed in person. Not right now.

But that was no help and no assurance. I still didn't dare get out of the car. Or knock the driver over the head and take over the car myself. At ninety miles an hour, and with a visual impression of moving slowly along city streets, that would be a sure form of suicide.

Or would it?

Apparently I had no choice but to wait until we arrived at our destination and then do what I could—which might not be much.

Lord, if I could make another vp call before we got there!

Careful, though. Even with no operator at the telenizer, I had to watch out for thought leakage. My thoughts were surely being recorded, and certain kinds of thoughts might trigger automatic precautionary measures.

I gave the defense mech a hard bang with my hand. It clicked twice. I got a brief glimpse of the highway flashing past and the lights of other vehicles.

Then the clicking stopped, and we were back in town, crawling along. I hit the defense mech again, a series of lighter blows, and it obediently clicked and this time continued clicking; and we were on the highway again.

Making an effort to control my breathing and to muffle the sound of my rapidly pounding heart, I leaned forward and examined the controls of the auto intently.

There was a phone. Not a visiphone, of course, but a phone nonetheless. A means of communication. There was also a luminous radar dial that might or might not mean automatic controls.

Which might or might not be in operation.

I concentrated on the hands and feet of the driver. Neither moved perceptibly. The course of the vehicle was straight and constant, though, so that didn't prove anything.

"Hey, where in hell is this police station?" I asked.

With a slight backward-turning motion of his head, the driver replied, "Almost there. Just a few minutes now."

As his head moved, his hands moved the wheel a bare fraction.

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The auto did not swerve.

I took a deep breath and hit the driver on the side of the head with my doubled right fist as hard as I could. He slumped, and I hit him again. His hands slid from the wheel . . . and the car continued on its course.

I clambered into the front seat with the driver.

AS I lifted the mike, the auto started slowing down, and I thought for a moment it wasn't electronically controlled after all. That was a horrible moment, and I clutched at the wheel instinctively, but the car still did not swerve.

So I quit worrying about that and dialed the number.

The conversation, once I had the call through, took quite a little while. I had to convince the man that I was serious. While I was talking, arguing frantically, the auto was slowing almost to a stop, maneuvering over to the turning lane on the right, making the turn and following a narrow road that crossed under the highway.

The urgency of my voice must have been pretty convincing, because the voice on the other end finally said, "Well, I'll do what I can, Mr. Langston, but it'll take time. Maybe an hour. Maybe more. And so help me, if this is a joke—"

"It's no joke," I pleaded. "Believe me, it isn't. Please make it as fast as you can. Civilization may be at stake." On that deliberately ominous note, I hung up.

Immediately I began thinking of the things I should have done, the machinery I should have set in motion instead of the one thing I had done. By all means, I ought to have notified the police directly. My notion that telenosis influenced all the police desk sergeants in town was hysterical, baseless. Well, I could call back, even now—

But I couldn't.

The car was moving at a relatively slow speed—but still over fifty miles an hour, on a narrow unpaved, downgrade road. Through the side window I saw dark trees and shadowy brush gliding by.

And then through the window I saw lighted storefronts, mail boxes, a few vague pedestrians on smooth sidewalks, and two dogs running tirelessly beside the car, barking as they ran . . .

Repeated pounding on the heavy black box did not restore reality.

Now I did not dare use the phone again or even think about it. I was sitting beside the driver, and the driver was sitting erect at the wheel.

On a sudden, stupid impulse, I struck at the driver's head, and

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my hand went through it without touching anything. I groped with my hand until I felt the man's limp head where my eyes said his shoulder was.

With a suppressed shudder, I drew my hand away and sat back in the seat to wait. It couldn't be long now.

The car turned a corner and continued at a much slower pace. It went perhaps a hundred yards before it pulled to the curb and stopped. Across the street I saw the police station. The entrance looked like any other store or business entrance, but a marquee-sign above the entrance read: "Section 4 Police Station."

The driver sat motionless behind the wheel. He would not move, I knew, until . . .

I shrugged, picked up the defense mech, and opened the door.

Pedestrians walked by along the sidewalk, and autos glided in both directions on the street. Dogs yapped at my heels. I ignored them. They did not exist.

But I knew the police station did exist.

I walked directly toward the entrance — a long kitty-corner across the street. When a powerfully humming auto headed toward me, I closed my eyes and braced myself and continued walking.

It is not a pleasant sensation to be run down by a car—even a dream-car with no substance.

My skin was prickly and my palms moist. I could feel the blood pounding in my head.

The door to the police station was open. A short flight of stairs went up to another door that was closed. I did not ring the bell, but opened the door and stepped into the reception room.

The room was empty except for the uniformed policeman sitting at the radio bank on the other side of the railing with his back to me. He wore earphones.

As the door clicked shut, the policeman turned in his swivel chair to face me.

"Hello, Langston, we've been expecting you," he said.

It was Isaac Grogan.

I smiled and replied with calmness that amazed me:

"Yes, I daresay you have, Zan Matl Blekeke."

MAXWELL and I were alone in the small, bare, brightly lighted but windowless room.

Blekeke had spent a half-hour after my arrival trying to find out how much I knew. But after my initial shocker—letting him know that I recognized him—I had kept my mind closed tightly; and I was keeping it closed now. Blekeke was still listening in—I had no doubt of that. Maxwell knew it too, for he made no attempt at conversation.

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He sat with his back to the walls in one corner, and I crouched in another corner, and we sat there, staring at the walls and at each other, not daring to speak or to think.

After about ten or fifteen minutes the door opened, and Blekeke stepped in. He was wearing earphones, and a wire trailed behind him. In one hand he carried a blaster.

He smiled broadly and nodded, once at each of us. "Something show you," he said. "Watching."

He pushed a button on the wall beside the door and the lights died. For an instant everything was black, and I braved myself. Then the wall beside Blekeke glowed, flickered—and a scene in black and white came into focus.

"This observer room," Blekeke said. "Show what camera top meeting hall see."

The scene was dim; a half-moon bobbed and splashed in ocean waves in the background. In the right foreground, close and large, dark and dull, was the spaceship.

It was Martian, but not military. An old cargo carrier. Its rear jets were extinguished, but the ship was vibrating.

Leaving? I wondered — and Blekeke caught my thought over the telenizer earphones.

No—just arriving, was his answer in my mind. *But it leave again very soon. You with. Soon no matter what you know. What did. Soon gone.*

How soon? I demanded.

Blekeke spoke aloud: "Very soon. Fifteen, twenty, half-hour minutes. Looking more. All way right."

I looked at the extreme right edge of the picture, where a rough, shadowy hillock arose. While I watched, an opening appeared in the hillock and a dim human figure emerged. It stood erect and walked across the stretch of gravel beach toward the spaceship. Another figure came from the hillock aperture and followed the first.

The thought came from Blekeke: *Cultists. Evidence. Prove my success.*

Success in what? Why? How?

Blekeke pushed the button on the wall again, and the lights were suddenly on, and the wall bare.

"No harm tell you now," he said. "Gone soon. No matter."

HE leaned against the wall and crossed his fragile arms across his huge red chest. He said:

"Mars home dying. You know. Need more somewhere. Earth best, but some Earthmen deciding not want." He shrugged. "Dear Late Doctor—" he did not bother making the mystic sign—

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"was brilliant man. Dr. Homer Reighardt—know name? Psychiatrist. Very old. No, I not kill; death natural. I wanted live longer, but . . ." he shrugged again. "Learned much from, howso. He founded cult. I his servant after joining. He idea very innocent—cure not really sick with mild 'nosis."

He smiled modestly. "I also brilliant person. Learn tech part much rapid. Apply own idea, which not so innocent. Fact, very insidious. Telenize right persons, they *want* Martian then! Vote to let come, yups?"

Maxwell broke in: "Then why didn't you start in on the right people at once? Why not set up your headquarters in Belgrade and telenize the World Council members, instead of playing around with a bunch of hypochondriacs here?"

Blekeke held up his hand. "So fast not so. Must work with what got. Doctor machine very simple, and he telling me not all. Not trusting even me all way. Needing much work, then. Muchness development. Six months I working, then need testing. SRI, oaks? So now have proof for Mars government, which verysome cautious. Demanding evidence."

This time I broke in. "Blekeke," I said, with some of the respect I was beginning to feel for him, "you're a patriot, I guess, and I have to admire you for that. But you're also a damned fool. You can't get away with this—and I think you know it. There are just too many loopholes."

"Where loop-hole?"

"Well, in the first place, I made a phone call before I got here—while I was in the car and my defense mech was on. As a result, the police will be here in a very few minutes—probably before you can get to the rocket—"

Blekeke smiled blandly. "Where second place?"

"In the second place, assuming that you do get to the spaceship and take off before the police get here, it still won't matter. They *know,* now, who has been operating the telenizer. They can track you down. You'll be picked up long before you get to Mars." I stood up and strode purposefully toward him. "Give me the blaster, dammit. You're licked before you're even started."

Blekeke frowned and pointed the blaster at my chest. "Please. So fast not so. Go back corner, please."

I obediently returned to the corner and sat down. It had been worth a try.

The Martian lowered the weapon and smiled. "You too brave. I not like kill. But pfoof for loop-hole. All plugged. Look-

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ing what front-door camera see. Polices here now."

He pushed the button on the wall.

A POLICE auto was screeching to a halt in the driveway before the big house, and a half-dozen uniformed men, armed with deadly blasters, were piling out. Another car was whipping around the final curve.

I knew that Maxwell was giving me a look of gratitude, but suddenly I wasn't sure it was warranted. I had assumed on a sort of blind faith that the police would get here in time—but as I watched the scene, I didn't feel so good.

For the policemen were not charging the house. They were not even looking at it.

They were milling around, aimlessly. No, not aimlessly, exactly. They were looking *for* something; but they weren't seeing it. One of them got back in the car and used the radio, and the others wandered around, glancing unseeingly in all directions.

"Mass telenosis?" I asked quietly, not taking my eyes from the scene, feeling my heart pound harder as I caught a glimpse of the bobbing, slower lights of another vehicle on the road far back.

Blekeke said, "Yups. Plug all loop-hole. Police not see house, not see ship. No one see ship leave, not knowing Blekeke on board. Complete vanish." He shrugged. "Ship keep commercial schedule. Take auxiliary power to right course, then switch rocket. Stopped on way, maybe, so what? Telenize searchers, yups?"

"What about the house?" I asked.

"Go boom when we leave," Blekeke said.

Maxwell said, "Judas! Everyone will just assume that we and Blekeke and all the cultists have gone boom, too. That's likely to end the investigation right there. Slow it down plenty, at least."

Blekeke nodded applaudingly. "Yups. Is so."

He pushed the wall-button and we had the spaceship scene again. Men and Martians were loading large crates into the port of the ship. The other bulky boxes were being moved across the beach from the opening in the hill.

"Leaving soon now," Blekeke said as he switched the lights on. "That most of vital equipment. Other going boom. We work awful quickness, yups?"

"Just how do you mean?" I asked, more to kill time than out of real curiosity.

"Ha! You not knowing how quickness we work since morn-

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ing—since getting Maxwell brain band on measure machine Sun Ray . . ."

Maxwell exclaimed; "Oh, hell, of course! Son of a blunder! *That*'s how you got it."

I HAD already figured that out, and I guessed it was the information Blekeke had gained from Maxwell's mind that was forcing him to act now, before he had planned.

"When learned you planning 'vestigate SRI, had move fast," Blekeke corroborated. "So did. Not know you law man till then. Only that Langston mind stopped 'nosis. Not even knowing why. Worried for while—whew!" He wiped the mock perspiration from his brow and smiled.

I said, "The thugs who attacked Maxwell and me were Grogan's men. May I ask now—just out of curiosity—were they telenized, or was Grogan?"

Blekeke seemed happy to reply. "Grogan. Reighardt happened work on Grogan in CI. Also your brain wave number in file, but I getting first on Sun Ray machine."

I had wondered about that, and there was another question that was bothering me.

"When you started that blood dripping in the bathtub," I said, "was that a deliberate attempt to scare me away, or was that part of the standard treatment?"

"Standard," Blekeke replied. "Subject no longer trust own senses after. But recognize 'nosis, so trying frighten you. Work good on others."

I started to ask another question, but he switched on the spaceship loading scene again.

A crane was hauling the last huge crate into the hold. All the humans—the SRI cultists—were apparently aboard ship. None were visible. A few Martians stood near the ship, some of them looking toward the hillock opening, and some watching the loading.

Suddenly two policemen came into view on the screen, walking casually over the hill in which the opening was located. At the top they halted and looked out over the ocean.

One of the men looked over his shoulder and pulled a bottle from an inside pocket. He offered it to his companion, who shook his head. The man shrugged and took a deep swallow himself, tucking the bottle inside his jacket again.

I caught a sudden note of mild alarm from Blekeke's mind, which reminded me that he was still listening for careless thoughts of mine.

The policemen continued walking toward the beach, heading to the right of the spaceship. I saw

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one of the Martians step back into the shadow of the ship. The others followed the policemen with their eyes.

"We best going now," Blekeke said. He reached to turn off the picture . . .

And his hand froze. He saw the same thing I saw, and at just about the same time.

He saw a dog.

And he must have felt the triumphant, incoherent chortle that gushed from my mind.

THE dog was a small, ragged, spotted terrier. It came trotting absentmindedly over the hill after the policemen, and at the top it stopped. It quivered. It sat down, pointed its nose at the spaceship and opened its mouth in a howl I could almost hear.

Then the scene was gone; the lights in the room glowed; Blekeke was pointing the blaster at me.

And his trigger finger was trembling.

He was shaking, very slightly, all over. His red-hued skin had turned a much paler shade.

I don't think I moved a muscle while I waited for him to speak.

"I should killing you," he said. "Right now, I should killing you. Then maybe killing me. Or make boom." He laughed shrilly, almost hysterically. "You very cleverish. Finding one weakener. Tell polices bringing dogs."

"Why, no," I said. "As a matter of fact, I told the dogs to bring the police."

That caught his interest. His hand on the blaster relaxed enough so that I could breath.

"That call I made from the car, coming here," I said. "It wasn't to the police. After the results of my first call to them, I thought it was just possible that you had somehow telenized all the desk sergeants. I wasn't thinking too sharp just then. Anyway, I called the city dog pound, instead. I told 'em to get as many dogs out here as fast as they possibly could."

Blekeke spoke in a very soft voice. "Cleverly, cleverly. And I giving self way."

"You sure did," I agreed. "There's dogs in every damn vision you dream up, you hate 'em so much. Same way some people have snakes."

Blekeke gestured with the blaster. He had regained some of his color, and he wasn't trembling. "Getting up now. We leaving. Not kill if not necessary."

Maxwell and I stood up. Blekeke backed through the door, motioning for us to follow. He walked us ahead of him along a corridor and down two flights of stairs, staying a safe distance behind us.

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The entrance to the tunnel was in the basement, through a door that looked like any other door.

Blekeke took off the earphones he was wearing and tossed them aside.

"This 'nizer blow up with house," he said.

The tunnel was wide, straight and brightly lighted. The opposite end was a small black dot, but it didn't take us long to get there.

My thoughts were running wild, now that no one was listening.

The dogs had bothered Blekeke, but how badly? He seemed so damned sure of himself now. No hesitation at all. Or—was it merely resignation? I didn't know. But if he once got us aboard that spaceship, his plan had a ridiculously good chance of succeeding.

. . . And would that be so bad? Were his motives so ignoble, or his methods so very atrocious?

I drove that line of thought from my mind. I could think about that later . . .

FROM the outside entrance of the tunnel, the dark spaceship seemed disturbingly close, and the expanse between it and us free of impediments of any kind. Only fifty or sixty quick steps, and then . . . The Martians at the ship saw us and climbed aboard. The ship was beginning to vibrate again.

The two policemen were wandering around by the water's edge. We could hear the dogs howling. Several others had joined in now, but we couldn't see them. They were above us.

"Walk slow to ship," Blekeke instructed, tenseness obvious in his voice. "Casual. Like nothing. I right behind."

Maxwell and I glanced at each other and stepped from the aperture to the gravelly beach and started walking very slowly and casually toward the spaceship.

We had gone about ten feet when we heard, in the short intervals when the dogs weren't howling, the crunching footsteps of Blekeke behind us. They were faltering.

I couldn't resist a backward glance.

I saw about a half-dozen dogs on the hill behind and above Blekeke. They were squatting on their haunches, noses pointed at the spaceship, and they were creating the damnedest racket I had ever heard. Surely the cops would at least *suspect* something!

Blekeke was walking stiffly, slowly, keeping the blaster pointed at us, making a visible effort not to turn around.

"Hey, you goddam dogs!" one of the policemen on the beach

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shouted. "Shut the hell up!" He picked up a rock and threw it, but he was too far away. The missile whizzed low over my head. I ducked instinctively, turning to see where the stone hit. It missed the dogs by a good fifteen or twenty feet.

Other policemen were appearing from the direction of the road, running anxiously toward the dogs, looking in the direction the dogs were pointing.

And seeing nothing.

Other dogs were appearing, too, some well within the vision of Blekeke — but another quick glance showed me that he was staring rigidly ahead and walking steadily.

We were entering the shadow of the spaceship. Less than twenty feet to go. Even in the dim light, I could almost distinguish the features of the Martian waiting there to haul us aboard.

THE policemen on the beach were now walking back to join the others. The one who had yelled and thrown the stone now whistled shrilly, and shouted, "Commere, you lousy, flea-bitten mutts, and shut up!"

He whistled again. Insistently.

One dog stopped howling and slunk forward timidly, then halted.

The whistle was a shrill command.

I heard a soft gasp, perhaps a sob, from Blekeke.

The dog trotted slowly, reluctantly, forward, tail between its legs, growling and whining at the same time.

"Running! Running! Hurry!" Blekeke screamed.

Instead, I turned around to watch, and so did Maxwell.

The policeman continued to whistle. Another dog, a large, shaggy collie, left the pack. But it was not timid, and it paid no attention to the policemen—it had seen Blekeke, and it rushed at him, snarling and yapping.

The Martian made a gurgling noise. A shudder shook his frame,

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and he turned and fired.

I was watching, without really comprehending what I saw, the policeman who had been whistling. Abruptly he stopped whistling. He was *looking*. But not at the dogs, nor at the other policemen. Not even at the shaggy collie that vanished suddenly in a blinding flash.

He was looking at the spaceship. And seeing it. He rubbed a hand across his eyes.

When the collie was hit, the terrier which had slunk forward turned. At five feet from Blekeke, it growled and leaped at him.

Blekeke collapsed. The blaster dropped from his hand, and he crumpled into a trembling, twitching, sobbing lump on the ground.

I rushed to grab the blaster, and Maxwell kicked the snarling, frightened dog away.

At the same time, the policeman yelled, "Jupiter! It *is* a spaceship! I knew I seen somethin'. I may have had a drink, but I ain't crazy!"

He fired while he was yelling, and the Martian who had been leaning from the port ducked inside. The ship shuddered and rose quickly, with a rumble that was almost drowned by the racket the dogs were making.

The policeman rubbed his eyes. "Huh? . . . I coulda swore I saw a spaceship. Right *there*. Just *now*. Just a second ago."

"Man, you really *are* drunk," his companion said.

The house blew up an instant later. No policemen were killed or injured in the explosion. They were all gathered on the beach to see why the dogs were howling.

It took a bit of explaining.

—DON THOMPSON

FORECAST

Next month brings THE MIDAS PLAGUE, a dazzler of a novella by Frederik Pohl, which hauls you into an inflation more preposterous and yet unswervingly logical than any you could ever imagine. It's a fact, of course, that national budgets never stop growing . . . which means that individual ones don't, either. Our national budget makes Jefferson's look laughable, for instance . . . and Morey Fry's budgeting problem makes this whole country's look just as pathetic and absurd! And in case your disbelief refuses to suspend, show it any good economic survey of the last 50 years—the proof is right there!

William Morrison returns with BEDSIDE MANNER, a novelet about the aftermath of a disaster in space and a broken, helpless female basket case who has to trust a surgeon to give her back her body and mind—an alien doctor who had never seen a human being before!

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THE *littlest* PEOPLE

By RAYMOND E. BANKS

Illustrated by BARTH

Getting a job in space was a big problem—but they solved it neatly by making it small!

WHENEVER Old Mott came to the asteroid with his little people, I always made Dad take me with him. I was fascinated with the little people. I was too fascinated. It finally made trouble.

My father was Personnel Director of the local *Asteroid Mines, Inc.* diggings on our tiny planet. He was one of the most important persons under the Dome. The workers and families of Point Montana always lifted their hats and smiled to him, and it was fun to be walking beside him and see the respect he got. Only the General Manager got more, and he was bald and they kidded about "Old Hat." But no one ever kidded with my father.

We climbed up the steps of

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Mott's space-burned old craft with a feeling of importance, at least on my part, because no one was allowed aboard an Employment rocket except the Personnel Director of the asteroid and one or two other high officials.

Old Mott met us at the entrance and bowed and grinned, his funny, old-fashioned glasses glittering and his almost toothless mouth shapeless in the smile. Then there was a long waste of talk while they had a glass of wine together. Meanwhile I was anxiously waiting, watching the door that burned so bright in my imagination. On the other side of its prosaic gray metal the little people rested.

"No technicians," apologized Mott. "I can give you some cooks, and some helpers and some housewife-hopefuls this trip. Many fine ones."

My father shook his head. "Unskilled labor is a drug here, Mott. Like everywhere. I feel sorry for the poor devils, but I can't take any, especially the housewife-hopefuls."

Old Mott looked disappointed. "Some of these people have been in space for many years," he muttered. "Too many. It ain't fair, Chet."

"Send them back to Earth."

Old Mott shook his head and sighed. Finally he and my father rose, and we went into the heavily locked room where the little people were.

OLD Mott had them arranged by profession. It was a small room, not over ten by ten, and three walls were filled with shelves. The little people were propped up along the shelves, with tiny name-plates beneath each one. They were about seven inches high and stood rigid like so many dolls. Only they weren't dolls; they were real people.

They were the poor, the unskilled, the have-not hopefuls. They couldn't get jobs on Earth. They couldn't pay their way to the planets. So they signed contracts with Greater New York Employment or one of those outfits and traveled from planet to planet and out through the asteroids looking for work. In one of these Employment ships, when they were reduced in size, you could get a couple of hundred; and as little people they needed very little food or oxygen. Full-sized in life, the ship wouldn't take two dozen. And so they traveled, in a fitful sleep, reduced in size, reduced in hope, trying to find a place to work and settle down and make a home.

Old Mott covered his stocks of little people with cellophane. That was so when Father or anybody picked one up, it wouldn't get dirty from handling. Some-

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times you almost thought their tiny eyes watched you. Other times, you couldn't be sure. In reduction they were supposed to sleep, with the agent doing all of the interviewing for them.

I wandered down the aisles, staring at the little people from Earth, while my father and Old Mott argued about a handful of laborers—all that Dad was going to buy this trip.

I was never allowed to touch the stock. It was a very important rule. Everybody felt a little ashamed about the little people and was sorry because they couldn't find a place to live. You were very careful not to handle them unnecessarily.

But down on the end one of them had fallen on the floor. I picked it up. It was a woman, maybe a girl. She was staring right at me with bold blue eyes and a smile. I would swear that she looked at me and winked. Hands trembling to feel that unspeakable warm life in my hand, I hastened to put her back on the shelf.

There was no place for her. Old Mott was getting pretty old at the time, and, I guess, careless. All the spots were filled and he must have let her fall to the floor and his weak old eyes didn't see her.

I wondered how long she'd been there.

I WALKED back to where my father and Old Mott were. My father and the old man had selected three laborers and were studying them through magnifying glasses, my father telling Old Mott how defective they were, and Old Mott insisting that they were real good merchandise. Just as I came up to them there was a commotion outside the ship. Some men yelled. I was curious; but I wanted to tell Old Mott about the tiny woman first.

"Father—"

"Please, son," said my father. "Don't interrupt."

He was always touchy in the little room. It was, I think, the aura of failure and hopelessness. It was the embarrassment of having to touch and handle and scan the tiny bodies of other people less fortunate than him, and deciding their fates in dollars and cents.

"Mr. Mott—"

"Go see who's climbing the ship, son," he ordered without looking. "I haven't got much time left. I'm due back on Mars Friday—"

I should have put the tiny figure on the table. But there was an unholy fascination in holding that hot little figure in my hand—a person born before me, an adult, and here she was a tiny foot-ruler of life in my hand. So I went out to see what the trou-

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ble was about, still holding her.

It was the Sheriff. He was herding along two men who hadn't worked out well on the asteroid. He had them in handcuffs, and they were fighting and cursing as he prodded them into the ship. My father and Old Mott came out and set down on the table the three tiny figures my father had chosen.

Then Old Mott and the Sheriff and my father dragged the two men into the Converter and shut the door. I could hear the explosive cries of the rejected men who had gotten into trouble on our asteroid. Then the machinery cut over them, whining with a scary sound that made me shake all over. Once I heard a scream.

Pretty soon they all came out again. The Sheriff went away, saying, "I hope you pick better ones this time, Mr. Blake."

Old Mott had two tiny figures in his hands. He wrapped them in cellophane and put them in his pocket.

"It'll be a cold day in January before I sell *them* two again," he said. "They been getting into trouble everywhere I take 'em. Let 'em cool for a while."

Then he and my father took the three new little figures and went back in the Converter. The machinery whined again, but this time it sounded different. Pretty soon they came out, and I blinked. I always blinked when I saw those tiny figures go into the Converter and come out twice as big as me, full-sized and smiling and being real deferential to Father.

"This is wonderful, Mr. Blake," said one. "We'll sure work hard, Mr. Mott."

"It was real kind of you to take us on, Mr. Blake," said another. "We ain't never had a chance before."

THEY looked at my father with smiles that tried too hard, and held their hats in their hands and bobbed their heads. You could see the whites of their eyes like a dog's. They wore the faded blues and reds of workers, and they were clumsy on their feet after so many months of being little. They were young, but they looked old and tired, and I had to swallow in my throat when they looked out of the window and saw how small and gray our little asteroid was, and how they kept on smiling and bowing, and swallowing their disappointment at their new home.

Father smiled back at them, but he'd heard it all before. Some of them would start drinking. Some of them would get in trouble with women. Some of them would get bored and make trou-

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ble. Not one in ten ever really liked our asteroid and really became one of us.

Maybe it was partly our fault, because it made a big difference how you came to the asteroid. If you came in a regular rocket, full-sized and with luggage, it was easier. Those were the engineers and doctors and scientists, and they were important in the Dome. But the little people made big lived on the sides of the Dome, where there was less oxygen, and they didn't ever make much or have much.

My father and I said good-by to Mr. Mott and climbed down the loading ladder. Old Mott peered after us through his glasses and smiled and waved, and my father waved the contracts up at him—the contracts that said that Father would deduct Old Mott's money from the laborers' wages every month, and also pay the Greater New York Employment its fee.

Then we started back for Point Montana, the new workers unsteady on their legs and still trying to be nice. My father walked between them, bracing them with his arms, and answered their questions. I brought up the rear.

And that night, nearly eight years ago, when I got home, I found Gleam in my pocket. I had forgotten to give her back to Old Mott. I had stolen one of the little people.

NATURALLY, I didn't know what to do with her—until I went in my sister's playroom and saw her dolls. Then I gave her to my sister Kate and told her that it was a new kind of doll, a used-up little-person that Old Mott had given me on the promise that I wouldn't tell the folks. I swore her to secrecy.

Kate jumped up and down, hugging the little figure in cellophane. "She gleams," she cried, "I'll call her Gleam."

For a while she played with Gleam like her other dolls, and our folks didn't notice because on Point Montana there was less power and fewer appliances and we all had to work—even my mother had to do her own washing by hand—and so we kids were left pretty much to entertain ourselves.

I figured Kate would get tired of Gleam and I could return her to Old Mott on his next trip. I worried quite a lot in the meantime, because I knew they had rigid laws about handling the little people.

The very day Old Mott came back, Kate brought Gleam to me.

"Look," she said. "I was dumping my stuff in the toy box, and your dump-truck fell on her."

There was something wrong

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with one of the legs. Gleam had straight, slim legs—but now one of them was oddly crooked. I ran to Dad's library and got the magnifying glass.

Gleam was good-looking, with a curved generous mouth that smiled and blue eyes that always had a far-off look of waking sleep. But now she was turning the lips in, and the cheek hollows stood out in pain, and there was sweat on her forehead. The blue eyes were closed. I got scared. I knew she was going to die.

"I'm going to tell Mother," said Kate, looking at my face and beginning to whimper. "I didn't bring her here, and I don't like her any more."

"All right, stupid, tell her," I said in misery. I was thinking what it would be like to go to prison—but Kate wouldn't understand that.

"Mom will probably stop our going to the videopix for three months," I said. That was something she could understand.

Kate stopped whimpering. "You can have her," she said. "You can do whatever you want. I won't say anything."

I DIDN'T plan to give her back to Old Mott before I asked some questions. I casually asked him about the whole process, and then about injuries to the little people. He'd been reduced once himself, a long time ago.

"Don't feel a thing," he said. "The Converter goes on, and you go to sleep while your molecules close up and a lot of water is taken out of you. Then you just drift and dream, slow, lazy, easy-like, until you get your full size again."

"What if they got hurt?"

"It might wake 'em up," he chuckled. "But ain't nobody gonna buy damaged goods, so they just better not get hurt."

That scared me more. If I gave her back to him, he couldn't get her a job now.

"Say, Chet," he asked my father, "I didn't leave a girl with you last time, did I? I got one missin'. Cute little blonde, she was."

My father smiled and shook his head. "You know I never take the cute ones. They only get the men to fighting, and make trouble. You probably bootlegged her to some slave-trader."

Old Mott laughed and winked and said he'd filled out a missing persons report, but, for all of him, one missing was just one less to worry about.

"Won't they—won't they send you to prison for that?" I asked, round-eyed.

Old Mott roared. "Prison? Naw, son, who cares about the little people?"

After that, I was determined

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not to give her back to him.

I got a first aid book and set Gleam's leg, using some of Mom's nailboards for splints. Then I put her in a pigeon-hole in my desk in my room, so I could check up on her. I even fed her with an eye-dropper like I'd seen Old Mott do once.

"Sugar and water once every month," he had once said. "God, ain't it a shame us reliable folk got to eat so much expensive stuff when they get by on sugar and water?"

IT was about two weeks after that when I got my next shock. I had checked on Gleam and found her eyes open and her face back to normal. Since she didn't move at all, I figured her leg was healing.

Then one night I sat down to do my homework and found a scrap of paper on my desk in front of the pigeon-hole. I could see some tiny scratches on it—some writing. I got the magnifying glass, my heart thumping.

"An injury might wake 'em up," Old Mott had said.

I read the note:

Littl boy. You brok my leg. Give me bak to the Mployment.

With trembling hands, I pulled her out of the pigeon-hole. I could feel the warmth of her body, and felt that I could even see her breathe. She was awake! I looked at her through the magnifying glass and tried to talk to her, but I could see the tiny head shake. She kept trying to raise her hand, and at last I saw she wanted the pencil.

Littl boy, she wrote in tiny, tiny script. *I cant heer you. Rite me note. Reel small note.*

I guessed then that my voice must sound like roaring in her ears.

I wrote her: *I can't give you back till the next employment rocket. Are you all right?*

She wrote: *I hurt. Im lonly. I want to go home.*

At that point I felt very sorry for her, and I felt guilty too. I held my breath while she took off the splint and tried her leg.

She moved slowly and with a limp. She walked the whole length of the desk, but the limp didn't go away. She put her hands to her tiny blonde head and shook as if in terror.

Wide-eyed, I pushed the writing pad to her.

I'm rooned, she wrote in panic. *I limp. Littl boy youve rooned my life.*

Maybe it'll get better, I told her, sick myself.

I was beetiful, she wrote, *but whos gone marry a crippld girl?*

I was utterly miserable. Her leg looked all right, but the limp wouldn't go away. In my child-

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like reasoning. I *had* ruined her life, and in my guilt I didn't know what to do. I couldn't tell Old Mott; I couldn't tell my father. Through damaging her leg, I had deprived her of a chance to get hired through Employment, and my father was the kind of man who took grim satisfaction in his principles.

"We are leaders," he would say, "and we must have principles. I would as soon send my own son to prison as allow injustice to pass."

It was this shuddery thought of his detached anger that imprisoned me with my problem. The only thing I could think of was to make Gleam into a schoolteacher. Miss Griswold, our teacher, had a withered arm and was very old. She was saving up to return to Earth. I figured that when I got to be a little older and understudied my father in his job as Personnel Director, I could take care of Gleam, and it wouldn't matter if she limped. Such is the selfish judgment of tender years.

I told Gleam of my idea.

No, she wrote. *I was waittres. I dont want scool. I will kill you if you dont let me go.*

I thought her threat was idle.

LATE at night, there is a change of machinery in the asteroid Dome. All the lights go off, and the oxygen goes up, and they blow the scent of mountain pine trees through the ventilators. I remember waking in the middle of the night with a weight on my chest, and drawing the pure air into my lungs and feeling that something was horribly wrong.

Gleam stood on my chest. Her figure was silhouetted against the dim starlight outside my window. She had my pocketknife. She was throwing her whole weight on it to stab me with the open blade, and before I could stop her, it plunged into my chest.

I screamed. Stupid, ignorant, revengeful Gleam — she had meant her threat of killing me!

When my parents came running, I clutched her hot body in my hand under the covers. I could feel my own blood on my pajamas and I was scared and sick and angry. But the act of pulling up the covers had dislodged the knife, and I realized that I was not seriously hurt.

I told my parents I'd had a nightmare.

"Dreaming of the little people," my mother said to my father. "You see, I told you he was too young to go on the Employment Rocket!"

My father shrugged and insisted that a son of his should be strong-minded, and they went back to bed.

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I got up on the edge of my bed and leaned over and vomited, feeling hatred and an underlying abysmal guilt toward the soft, squirming thing I held in my hands.

From the moment she plunged the knife blade in me, I was filled with anger and determination that she would not ruin my life, even by revealing her existence to my parents, who, I thought, would send me to prison. My idea of making her into a schoolteacher and hiring her to replace Miss Griswold, when I should have the power in a few years, grew from a promise snatched out of the air into real purpose.

She objected violently, first crying and then cursing me so loudly that I could faintly hear the words. As I heard the squeaking vileness pour from her tiny lips, my hate toward her deepened into an almost holy reverence for my mission. She had been a poor girl; she had not had much education; she only wanted to marry and settle down, or at least get a job as a waitress, which was the only thing she knew.

My feeling of pity for all the little folk, embarrassment at their poor possessions and awkward ways and helplessness, centered on her—her shallow and vile being. As I chained her to the desk with a solid gold-plated watch-chain that night, I had accepted the problem of her existence.

Next evening I went to work. *You are still good-looking,* I wrote her, *but you are stupid. I will make you less stupid. I will teach you how to be as smart and polite as Mrs. Ellensberg, the Chief Chemist's wife.*

Thus stirred by my emotions of fear, anger and pity, I laid out her schedule. When she refused to cooperate, I took the tiny arm and twisted it until she screamed. After that, she did what I wanted.

The period of childhood has a prisonlike quality of "do"s and "don't"s, and my own discipline had been no less severe than that which I passed on to her. I made her do my homework with me; I made her take exercise; and every night promptly at nine, I shut her in my bureau drawer.

In no other home on Point Montana could I have gotten away with it. But my parents were very busy people, and they left their children to amuse themselves, seldom even coming into our rooms. My sister Kate, of course, knew all about Gleam; but she was under my control, as younger sisters often are, and the secret was kept.

OF course, there were crises. One time my parents found the cat with its throat slit. I had

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to talk fast to get out of that one. I was going to put Gleam on bread and water for that sin, but when I saw the long, deep scratches that the cat had given her in its playful way, I said nothing.

Then there was the time that she got loose and filled her thimble with Father's wine. I usually fed her with scraps from the table, for sugar and water wouldn't do for Gleam now that she moved around and was awake. I kept the thimble in her drawer for her to have her milk in.

She came weaving into the study, slopping wine out of her thimble and singing a song that astounded my unsophisticated ears.

"Little boy," she said in her tiny voice, "I'm going to spit in your eye." She stood on her tiptoes, her blonde hair hanging loose, laughing. "Wow, what a party," she cried enthusiastically. "What a crime!"

I barely had time to scoop her up and hide her in the bureau before my father came snooping suspiciously into the room.

He smiled when he saw me with a thimbleful of wine.

"The young must learn by imitation," he said, "but you'll never get in much trouble if you only take a thimbleful at a time, John."

Then he gave me my first real wineglass full of wine, and I knew I was growing up.

We had a man-to-man talk in his study that night, about my future and my relations with Lucy Ellensberg, whom I had dated at school, and how I would go to work in Employment after I had been to school on Ceres. I almost told him about Gleam then, but when I started to talk about the little people, he got a pained look in his eye.

"I'm sorry, John," he said, "but you mustn't go overboard for them. They're people—but they're ignorant, superstitious and undisciplined. They must be treated differently."

Afterward, back in my room, I found Gleam crying in the bureau drawer. She was still drunk.

"I am going to kill myself, little boy," she wept. "Nobody loves me."

"You have a home here," I told her. "You are being trained for a good job. Soon you'll be able to teach school and marry someone who doesn't mind your limp."

She shook her head. "Someday you'll pay for this, little boy," she said, and then hiccupped and fell over and went to sleep. I couldn't help grinning. I reached in and brushed back her hair and eased her tiny figure into a more comfortable position.

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IT was when I went to school on Ceres that the change took place. Up until that time Gleam was like a pet, very little more to me than a frog or dog. But on Ceres, I had my first real drunk and my first real date; on Ceres it was *I* who didn't want to work, feeling the freedom of a real city, strange people, exciting things.

Gleam became my conscience. And I didn't particularly like it.

I had taken her to Ceres with many misgivings, not because I wanted to but because I was afraid to leave her behind. There were many other little people there, kept by the people of Ceres as pets just as I kept Gleam. Most of them were alcoholics or the demented who did not wish to become big again. So I was able to keep Gleam openly.

And now, at last, I began to think of getting rid of her.

The second day, I was walking down the astonishingly wide street with its gash of neon red and blue and green signs. Gleam, as usual, was standing in my pocket and leaning her elbows on the edge as she looked out. We came to the Ceres office of the Greater New York Employment. Suddenly, I stopped.

"Gleam," I said, speaking softly and a little high-pitched, the way I'd found she could best understand me. "Maybe it's time for you to be big again."

"No! Not now, little boy, it isn't time."

The tiny voice was almost a cry of terror. Something about it puzzled me.

When I asked her what was wrong, she wouldn't talk to me.

That night, I told my roommate, Rand, about it.

He shrugged. "They get afraid. They get used to being taken care of. She won't ever want to be big again."

Now, for the first time, I was eager to get rid of Gleam; and she wouldn't go. She put on airs on Ceres. She acted very strangely, insisting on complete privacy for dressing and undressing, and when we traveled she preferred to ride on my neck, holding onto my ear and shouting wry comments at me.

"That Alice you been eying," she said one day. "She's a common slut. You've got a future at Point Montana; she's after you. Better watch out, little boy."

"I can take care of myself."

"Those clothes!" she laughed, pointing to another girl that I had been trying to be introduced to. "She dresses like a waitress. And listen to her language! Split infinitives and dangling participles all over the place. One would do well to ignore these street-women, little boy!"

After that, I didn't dare ask the girl for a date.

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GLEAM helped me with my lessons. She goaded me into doing them. She criticized my clothes and my manners and, since she knew cities and I did not, even told me where to go around the town. This was annoying to me—but with her help I did well in school, and, due to her knowledge of the seamier side of life, achieved a certain fame among my contemporaries as a man of the world.

She became increasingly meddlesome, and we had arguments often. Especially when I had dates and left her behind. I would come home to find her pacing my desk. "Well," she would sneer, "did the little darling find out how much you will make and how big a home you own and how

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much money your family has in the bank?"

"Never mind."

"You're an idiot, little boy. You have apples for brains."

We finally had it out on my last week at school.

"Gleam," I said, "when I go back, I'll have to get married, you know. That is, I can't hold a job in Employment unless I'm married. And Lucy Ellensberg is sort of—"

"What happens to me?" she cried.

"You'll have to get big and get a job. I kept you because I ruined your life. But in our house you've learned enough to get by as a schoolteacher or a governess. You've learned how the other half lives. I've paid for my sin in stealing you and breaking your leg."

"You could do better than Lucy Ellensberg!"

"I don't want to do better."

She picked up her thimble and tossed off the spate of beer I'd poured for her.

"There's me, for instance," she said. "After all, I know your habits—"

I burst into laughter. "You! Marry you! Why, Gleam, I think of you as a sister, with your bad leg and—"

Then I stopped laughing. Because she was staring at me with something in her tiny eyes that I'd never seen before. All the years, we'd fought every step of the way. I had found her vile and obscene. She had found me childishly cruel. I had made her life hell at home, and she had made mine hell on Ceres. Always it had been with a veiled contempt on both sides.

But this time her look was different.

"I'm sorry, John. I'm sorry you said that."

Before, I had always been "Little Boy." And I had always called her Gleam, because I knew her real name was impossibly corny.

My chest felt hot. I was embarrassed. "I'm sorry too, Millicent," I said. "But this is as far as we can go together."

THE next day I took her to Employment, and she didn't complain. A thick distance lay between us.

They accepted her. The last time I ever saw tiny Gleam was as she strode importantly up and down the Director's desk, limping but waving her hands in earnest and giving them complete instructions on the important job she wanted. Somewhere far away.

"As far away as possible from provincial bumpkins like John Blake!" she cried to the Director. "You will make a good deal of money from me, my good man!"

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His jaw dropped, and the others in the room gathered around the self-important, strutting little figure as I slipped out to freedom.

I was oddly disturbed at the parting, yet oddly pleased. The years of discipline had paid off for Gleam. She'd always had a good brain, just an undeveloped one; now she was fast, capable, bursting with confidence. I knew she'd get along.

The next months were exceedingly enjoyable. For the first time in more than seven years, I didn't have to worry about Gleam. At first, I missed the business of feeding her and taking care of her wants; but far more than that I enjoyed being able to exercise privacy. I read what I wanted, kept the hours that I wanted, and dated the girls I wanted.

Finally I returned to start my new job in Employment on Point Montana.

"I won't ask too many questions about Ceres," smiled my father, who was noticeably older. "You seem to have matured astonishingly for your age. Ceres was good for you, John. By the way, Lucy Ellensberg is coming over for supper tonight."

I had anticipated that night for a long time. Lucy seemed lovely; she had charm and manners; I was only a little disappointed to see how much her thoughts revolved around petty matters of the Point, and how soft and selfish she seemed.

It was all very routine. We were alone; the night lights of Point Montana gleamed in fuzzy softness; we stood in my parents' tiny garden and smelled the pine scent of the ventilators, and I proposed and was accepted.

"We'll live in a small house by the edge of the Dome at first," I told her. "I want to get the feel of the workmen's lives, since I'll be hiring them."

"Well," she said dubiously. "Only for a very short time, John. After all, there's our part of the social calendar to keep up!"

"And then we'll have to get started on a family."

She laughed: "Later, John. It's all right for you—you've been out to see the world and had your fling. But for me it's the first time away from home. I want parties! I want to learn to get drunk and have some real fun—"

It went on that way, and suddenly I saw Lucy as she really was. Suddenly I realized that Gleam had left her mark on me, despite her ignorance of social ways. In day-to-day close contact with Gleam's adult mind, I had gone a long way past the kids of my own age on the Point.

Lucy would be fine when she grew up a little more.

After she left, I noted that we

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had been standing near the spot where I had buried the cat Gleam had killed many years before. Alone in the garden, smoking a cigarette, I stared up through the Dome at the stars and wondered what Gleam was doing that night. It was certain that she wasn't worrying about the size of house she lived in—Gleam hungered for any sort of a shack of her own.

What would I do if Gleam should come this way again? I didn't know. Up until tonight, I'd thought I had planned my life with Lucy.

I remembered then that the Greater New York Employment rocket was due next week, and I put out my cigarette and went in, a sort of expectant fear surging inside.

MY father and I were there when the rocket landed. Old Mott was dead, of course, but young Billy Stanger grinned and poured the wine, and we sat and talked while I leafed through the list of names and occupations on the printed sheets. Trying to look casual, I turned to the "Schoolteachers" section.

Millicent Hamm leaped out of the page at me.

I kept my voice steady, but I couldn't keep excitement out of it.

"I need a schoolteacher," I said. I thrust the paper at him. "Try this one. I'm sure she'll be all right. I won't go in the room if you don't mind. Just put her through the Converter."

Employment people see much, say little. Stanger nodded and went out. Presently he came out of the stock room, carrying something in his hand, and went into the Converter. I heard the machinery squeal and slowly got to my feet. The door opened.

For comfort she was wearing briefies of pleasing black and white, bootlets, and a ribbon in her hair. The eyes were hard and suspicious, stuffed with a knowledge of me. The legs were youthful and graceful, but there was a slight limp. She was tall, a walking dream from my memories, barely three inches shorter than I, moving with assurance and poise.

The Gleam I had made stood and stared at the John Blake she had made.

"Well, little boy," she said in a voice that sounded loud because I'd always heard it thinner, "I see you got trapped in this forlorn dump for the rest of your life."

"So have you," I said, walking toward her. My father and Stanger were staring.

She raised her arms. Her eyes got wet.

"So have I," said the new Gleam.

—RAYMOND E. BANKS

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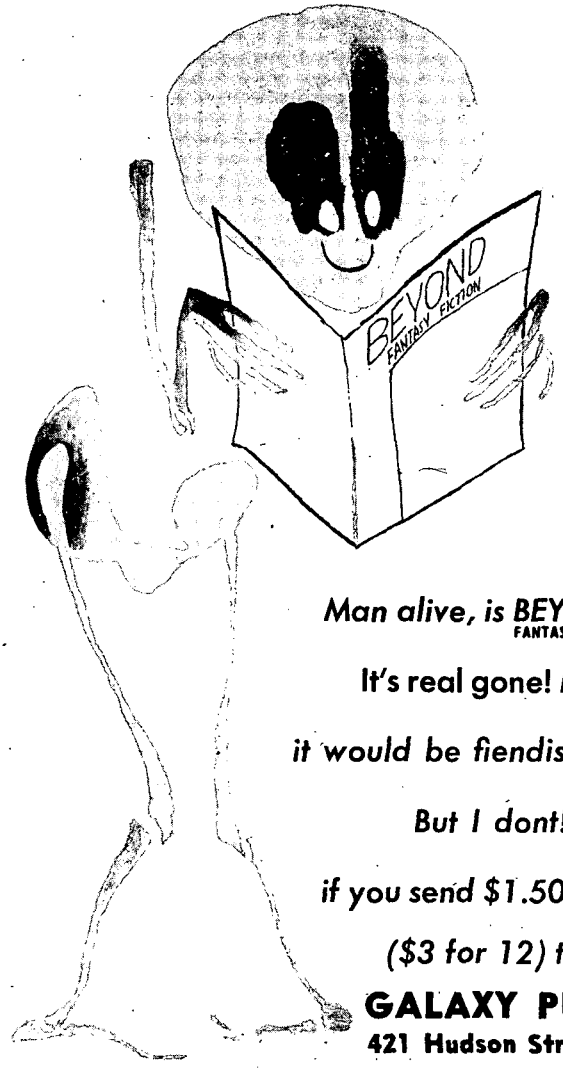
THIS IS WHAT I CALL LIVING!



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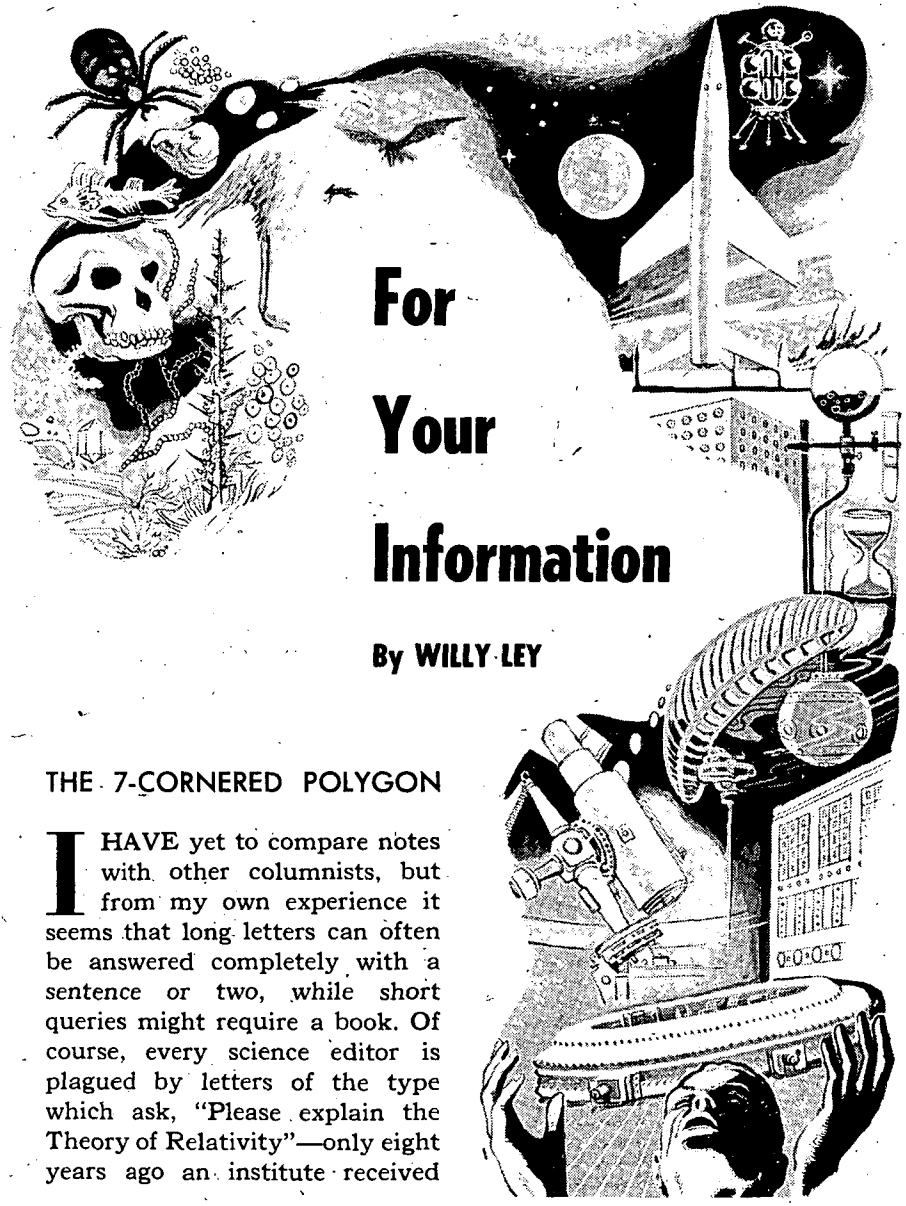

For Your Information

By WILLY LEY

THE 7-CORNERED POLYGON

I HAVE yet to compare notes with other columnists, but from my own experience it seems that long letters can often be answered completely with a sentence or two, while short queries might require a book. Of course, every science editor is plagued by letters of the type which ask, "Please explain the Theory of Relativity"—only eight years ago an institute received

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the perfectly serious request from a lady to "please send me what has been published about aviation"—but that is not the kind I have in mind. I am thinking of a short letter that came in some time ago and which consisted of precisely three sentences.

In the first sentence, the correspondent explained that his hobby was the making of scale models and that a classical chariot was the current project. In the second sentence, he said that the picture he owned showed seven-spoked wheels and could I tell him how to construct one. The third sentence thanked me for whatever help I could give.

This was easy. I made a sketch and said that this would do for his purpose, even though the construction was incorrect mathematically. Back came the reply that it had worked beautifully, but why did I say that this construction was incorrect? He had tried it several times and had come to the conclusion that the "in" in front of "correct" had slipped in by mistake. But if it hadn't, why was it incorrect?

Well, the answer is this column, for the simple question requires a treatise on the division of the circle.

LET'S begin with fundamentals. Using a protractor for dividing a circle isn't permitted—in geometry, that is. You can use a protractor if you want to cut up a pie or to make a wheel with a silly number of spokes; in short, for practical purposes. But in geometry you can use only two instruments, a pair of compasses and a straight edge. Furthermore, the straight edge must be used only for connecting points, *not* for measuring distances.

This strict rule has a good reason, even though beginners often have trouble understanding it. Ideally, you do all this in your head, drawing lines in the air with your finger; the lines on paper are merely a means of remembering (and communicating) what you have found by thinking. The straight lines just show which point is supposed to be connected with which other point. The circles "measure" since every point along the periphery of a circle has the same distance from its center.

A protractor and other mechanical devices are "forbidden" because they will furnish information which did not exist in your head *first*. You are not supposed to read off an angle of 30°; you are supposed to find it by reasoning.

For example: the sum of the three angles of a triangle is 180°; hence, each angle in an equilateral triangle must be 60°, and 30°

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is half of such an angle. Or: a right angle is 90°; if I construct an equilateral triangle in a right angle, the difference between the right angle and the triangle must be 30°.

Now let's go on with the problem. Fig. 1 shows the ordinary hexagon, constructed, in this case, by first halving the circle by means of a straight line going through its center, and then using the compasses with the same opening that was used to draw the original circle from both ends of the diameter, points 2 and 5 in the diagram. Or you can do it without drawing a diameter first, by simply starting at any one point of the periphery with the compasses and going around. By halving the angles, you obtain the points for the 12-cornered polygon. In the diagram, the usual method of halving was not used, since in this construction you can halve one of the 60° angles—the one formed by points 1 and 6 with the center of the circle—by erecting a vertical line on the diameter.

By jumping every second point of the hexagon, you obtain an equilateral triangle, and by doing this twice in succession, you obtain the figure shown in Fig. 2, the Star of David (which produces a hexagon in its center). Another way of arriving at the 12-cornered polygon is shown in

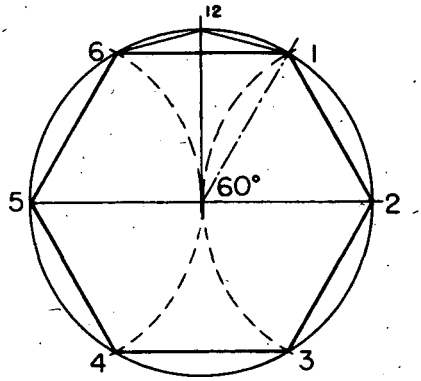

Fig. 1

Fig. 3. Instead of starting with a hexagon and halving every angle, you begin with two diameters of the circle forming right angles at the center. Then you use the compasses with the same opening used for the original circle from these four points (Nos. 3, 6, 9 and 12 in the diagram) in the manner shown in the right half of the diagram.

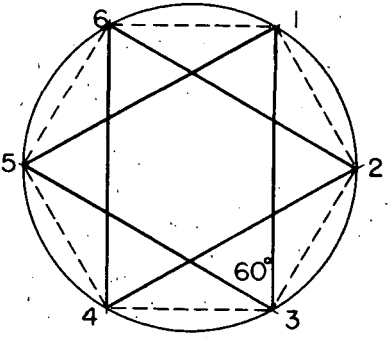

Fig. 2

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The result is a figure sometimes called the Lilac Blossom (indicated at points A and B) and also the 12-cornered polygon.

THERE is still another way of constructing an equilateral triangle in a circle. This consists of drawing a radius of the circle, halving the radius and erecting a vertical line on the halfway point. The distance from the halfway point to the periphery of the circle is one-half of the side of the equilateral triangle, indicated by the points A, 2 and B in Fig. 4.

But it so happens that this half side is *very nearly* the side of a 7-cornered polygon. The difference is quite small, amounting to 17/10,000th of the radius of the circle; if you have a circle with a radius of 40 inches, the difference is just about 3/32nd of an inch. Such an approximation is good enough for seven-spoked wheels, model or full scale, but it is only an approximation. To construct the true side of the 7-cornered polygon with compasses and straight edge is impossible. The same holds true for the 9-cornered, 11-cornered and 13-cornered polygon, to mention only a few cases.

Don't waste your time trying. You probably will find approximations galore, but no true construction.

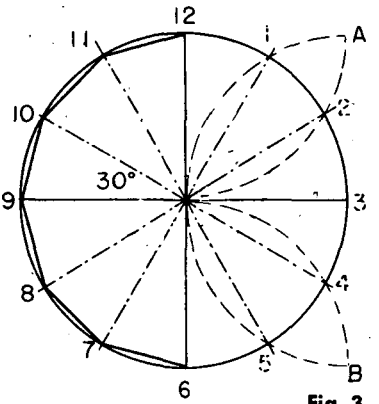

Fig. 3

In fact, there are only a few series which can be properly constructed. So far I have dealt with the one which I think of as the "hexagon series," which produces, beyond the hexagon, polygons with 12, 24, 48, 96, etc., corners. Another may be called the "square series," which is based on the square derived from two diameters at right angles to each

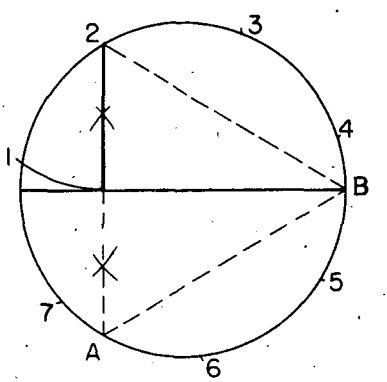

Fig. 4

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other (Fig. 5) and leads to polygons with 8, 16, 32, 64, etc., corners.

Another one is the "pentagon series" (Fig. 6 and 7) which, interestingly enough, does not really begin with the pentagon but with a 10-cornered polygon. The method is shown in Fig. 6. When you draw a smaller circle inside the first circle, the diameter of the small circle is equal to the

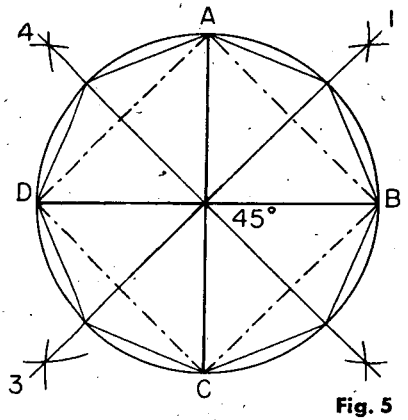

Fig. 5

radius of the large circle. Then you connect the center of the small circle to the point marked "3" in Fig. 6. The distance from point 3 to the periphery of the small circle is the side of the 10-cornered polygon. By jumping over every second point of the 10-cornered polygon, you obtain the pentagon, and by jumping every second point in the pentagon, you obtain the "magic" five-pointed star with a smaller pentagon in its center (Fig. 7). The "pentagon series," of course, leads to polygons with 20, 40, 80, 160, etc., corners.

Since a full circle has 360°, the angle required for a 15-cornered polygon is 24° and that can be constructed in an interesting manner. The angle of the equilateral triangle is 60°. The angle of the 10-cornered polygon is 36°. And 60 minus 36 = 24. The actual

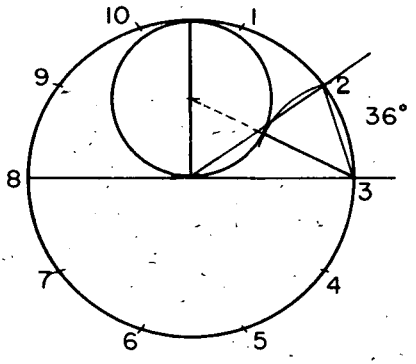

Fig. 6

construction is shown in Fig. 8. This naturally leads to polygons with 30, 60, 120, etc., corners by simple halving of the angles.

For more than twenty centuries, these remained the only polygons that could be constructed, even though people through all these centuries kept looking for more. They were especially interested in the 7-cornered polygon because seven is supposedly a magic and holy num-

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ber. They also devoted much effort to the 9-cornered polygon, but for no special reason than that it just seemed to be simple.

Nobody, to my knowledge, ever wondered whether the possible and impossible constructions might both be covered by some law which one may discover.

IT was in 1796—we even know the date: March 30th—when a 19-year-old student discovered that law. His baptismal name was Johann Friederich Carl Gauss, but later he signed his work Carl Friedrich Gauss.

One of the consequences of the discovery was that it was possible to construct a 17-cornered polygon. It is not as simple a job as the ones discussed. In fact, the explanation would take up as much room as I have for my whole column, so that I can only say here where it may be found: in F. Klein's *Famous Problems of Elementary Geometry* (Hafner, New York, 1950). The 17-cornered polygon naturally leads to polygons with 34, 68, 136, etc., sides, and by using a method similar to the one for the 15-cornered polygon, you can also construct a 51-cornered polygon (from triangle and 17) and an 85-cornered polygon (from pentagon and 17).

Well, what is Gauss's law? What is possible?

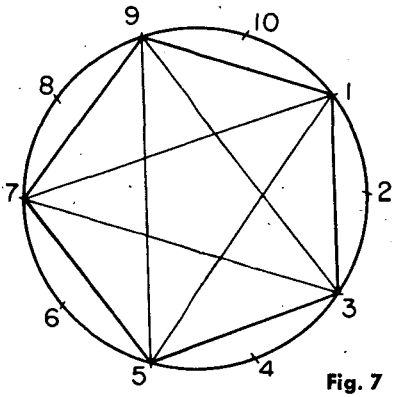

Fig. 7

Gauss's first reasoning was that only polygons with an *odd* number of sides need to be considered. The even-numbered polygons are just the result of halving angles; the whole "square sequence" works that way, because you first halve a full circle, then the semi-circle and so forth. Gauss then found and *proved* that the odd-numbered polygons

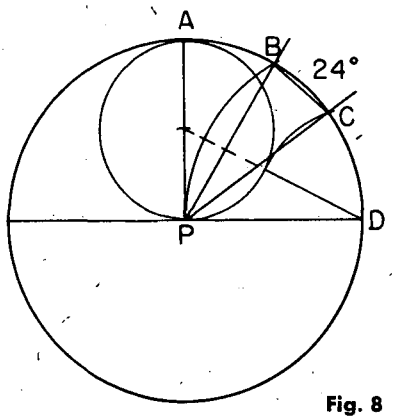

Fig. 8

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which can be constructed are the same as the Fermat primes. Therefore you can construct:

$2^1 + 1 = 3$ (triangle)
$2^2 + 1 = 5$ (pentagon)
$2^4 + 1 = 17$
$2^8 + 1 = 257$
$2^{16} + 1 = 65{,}537$

All of them actually have been constructed, the last one of this series only once. And you can also construct odd-numbered polygons where the number is the product of the multiplication of two Fermat primes, hence the 15-cornered polygon (3 x 5) and the 51 and 85-cornered polygons (3 x 17 and 5 x 17, respectively). Likewise the 3 x 257-cornered polygon, etc., etc., should be possible. But 7, 9 and 13 are not.

ANY QUESTIONS?

How does a living cell know when to stop growing? Does the action of gravity have anything to do with the decision of an ameba to split?

David L. Osborn
Higashi-Nada Ku
Kobe City, Japan

The answer to this question is simple, if probably unsatisfactory: we do not know. There is obviously a complex of factors involved that will have to be unraveled slowly and patiently. Nor is it certain that an answer which would apply to a cell that is part of a unit (say, in the leaf of a tree or in the muscle of an animal) would also apply to cells that are "free," as, for example, the red corpuscles that circulate in our blood.

In the case of the ameba, cited by you, one might think of gravity as the determining factor if the ameba were a dry-land creature. But since it lives in water, which supports every portion of it, all the responsibility can't be placed on gravity alone.

I remarked in one of my books that one of the biological research projects after the completion of the space station might well be to have unicellular plants and animals, like bacteria and amebas, grow in a zero-g condition with plenty of food around and see what happens. I can't predict what will happen, but I do believe that whatever is going to happen will furnish the main clue for an answer to your question.

The Milky Way stretches from the northeast to the southwest. Does this give any indication as to our position in our galaxy? And another question: is the plane of the Moon's orbit around the Earth constant or does the

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Moon travel in various paths around us?

Irma Anita Jones
Route I, Box A
Comanche, Oklahoma

As to the first question: no. But from other observations, it has been concluded that our sun and its family of planets are between two-thirds and three-quarters of the total possible distance from the center. In other words, it is at least twice as far from the Sun to the center of the Galaxy as it is from the Sun to the rim.

The orbit of the Moon happens to be unusually complicated and its calculation ranks among the more difficult problems. The minimum distance is 221,463 miles, the maximum distance 252,710 miles. The inclination of the plane of the Moon's orbit, compared to the ecliptic, the plane of the Earth's orbit, also varies. It can be as little as 4 degrees and 57 minutes of arc and as much as 5 degrees 8¾ minutes of arc. This means that there is a kind of doughnut-shaped volume of space around the Earth which contains all the possible positions of the Moon.

I would like to know if the planets closer to the Sun rotate faster or slower; is there any relationship between the distance from the Sun and the speed of rotation of planetary bodies?

James A. Miller
2108 S.E. 156th
Portland, Oregon

I wish I could be perfectly sure that you actually mean "rotation" (around the axis) and not "revolution" (around the Sun). As regards the latter, there is a very precise and clear-cut relationship between the orbital velocity of a planet and its distance from the Sun. The closer they are to the Sun, the faster they move — Kepler's Third Law — the farther away from the Sun, the slower.

For example, Venus proceeds at the rate of 21.7 miles per second, the Earth moves at 18.5 miles per second, Mars 15 miles per second, Jupiter 8.1 miles per second, while Saturn proceeds at the comparatively leisurely pace of "only" 6 miles per second.

But there is no relationship between the period of *rotation* of a planet and its distance from the Sun.

Mercury, the innermost planet, completes one rotation in the same time it needs for one revolution, namely 88 days. The rotational period of Venus is not known, but it seems to be about two of our weeks. Earth and Mars have periods of 24 hours and 24 hours 37 minutes,

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respectively, while Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus rotate quite fast. The figures are, in the same order, 9 hours 55 minutes, 10 hours 14 minutes, and 10 hours 40 minutes. Neptune needs 15 hours and 40 minutes, while the rotation of Pluto is as yet unknown.

These figures look as if there might be a relationship between the size of a planet and its diurnal period because Jupiter, with an equatorial diameter of 86,700 miles, is the biggest planet and also has the shortest period. Saturn, Uranus and Neptune are slower in the order mentioned, which is also the order of decreasing diameters, namely 71,500, 32,000 and 31,000 miles, respectively. Likewise, when you consider the inner planets, Earth has a shorter diurnal period than either Venus, Mars or Mercury, and Earth is the biggest of the inner planets.

This sounds like an intriguing idea until you look at the *masses* of the planets rather than their *diameters*. Jupiter does rotate faster than Saturn, the difference being 20 minutes. But Jupiter's mass is equal to 317 Earth masses, while Saturn's is equal to 95 Earth masses. Saturn rotates faster than Uranus (25 minutes difference), but the difference in mass between these two is even more impressive, for Uranus has only 14.7 Earth masses. Neptune needs 5 hours more than Uranus, but while the *handbook* will tell you that Uranus has a somewhat larger diameter than Neptune, the same handbook will tell you that Neptune is the more massive of the two, having 17.2 Earth masses.

That these differences in rotational period are not in proportion to the differences in mass is especially clear in the case of the inner planets. In round figures, Earth is ten times as massive as Mars, yet the Martian period is only 37 minutes longer.

In short, there is no relationship between period of rotation and distance from the Sun, but in general it may be said that, at least in our solar system, the more massive planets tend to rotate faster than the lighter ones.

—WILLY LEY

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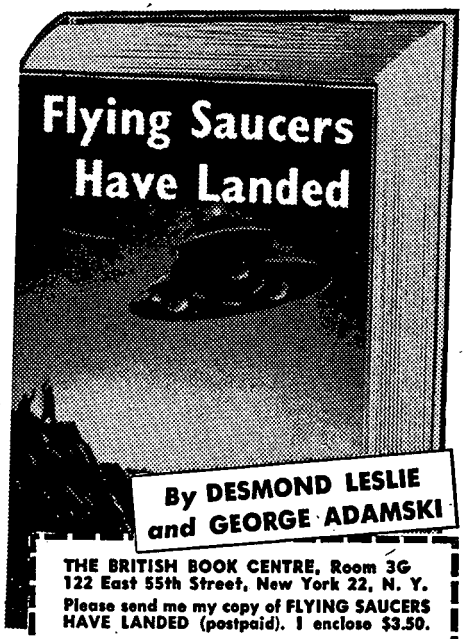

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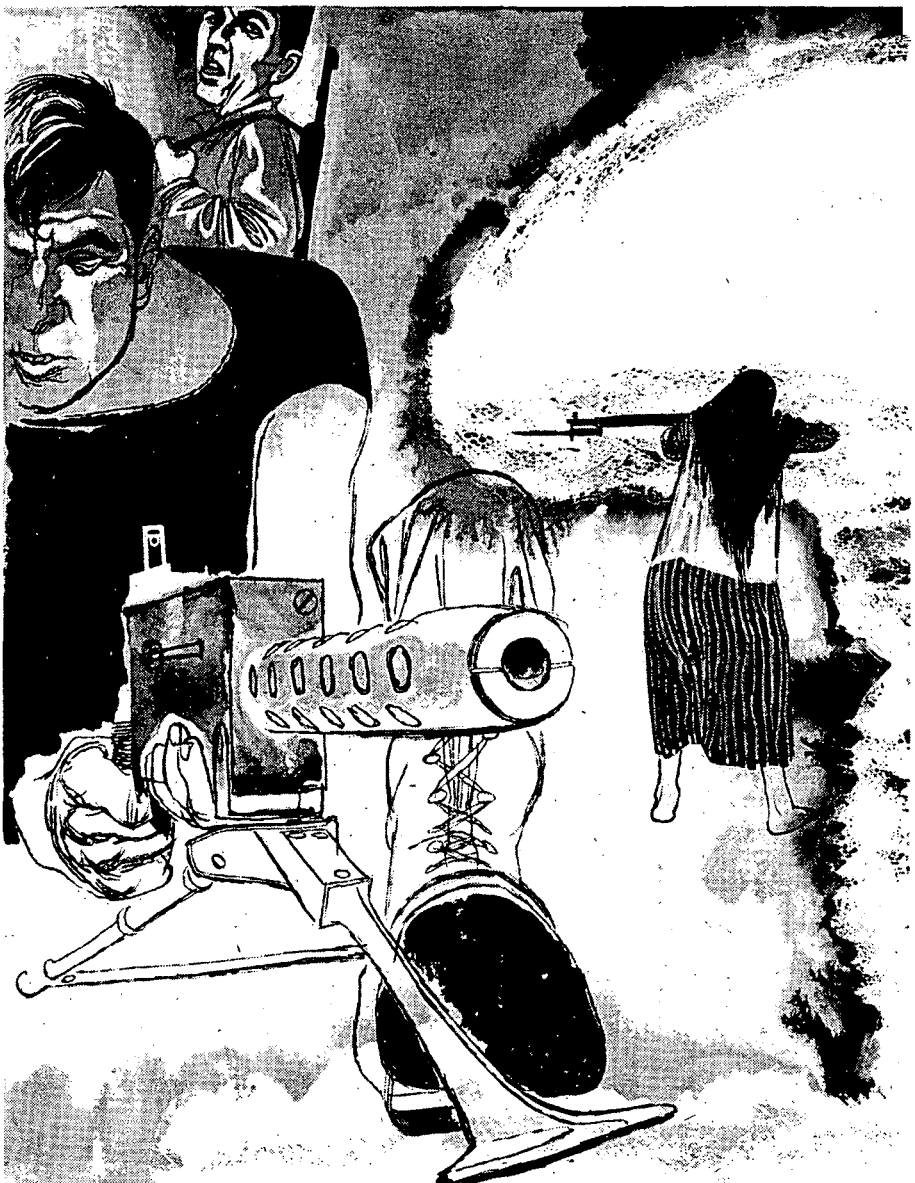

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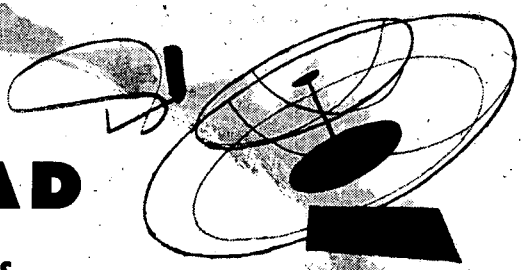

IRONCLAD

By ALGIS BUDRYS

Young Garvin's world was one of simple laws;

Walk with dignity; talk with dignity; above

all, kill with dignity . . . and kill and kill!

COTTRELL Slade Garvin was twenty-six and had been, technically at any rate, a sex criminal for three years, when his mother called him into her parlor and explained why she could not introduce him to the girl on whom he'd been spying.

"Cottrell, darling," she said, laying her delicately veined hand on his sun-darkened fist, "you understand I think Barbara is a fine girl—one whom any young man of your class and station

Illustrated by KOSSIN

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would ordinarily be honored to meet and, in due course of time, betroth. But surely you will admit that her family—" there was the faintest inhalation through the fragile nose— "particularly on the male side, is not one which could be accepted into our own." Her expression was genuinely regretful.

"More explicitly, her father's opinion on the proper conduct of a domicile . . ." The sniff was more audible. "Then too, his behavior in accord with that opinion is such that our entire family would be embroiled in an endless series of affairs of Integrity. You, yourself, would be forced to bear the brunt of these encounters, as well as the responsibility of defending the notoriously untenable properties which Mr. Holland pleases to designate as Barbara's dowry.

"No, Cottrell, I fear that, much as this match may appeal to you superficially, you must realize that the responsibilities entailed would more than offset any possible benefits." Her hand patted his lightly. "I'm sorry." A tear sparkled in each eye, and it was obvious that the discussion had been a great strain upon her, for she genuinely loved her son.

Cottrell sighed. "All right, Mother," he said. There was nothing more he could do at this time. "But should circumstances change you *will* reconsider, won't you?" he asked.

HIS mother smiled and nodded, as she said, "Of course, Cottrell." But then the smile faded. "However, it does seem rather unlikely, doesn't it? Are there no other young ladies . . .?" At his expression, the smile returned, and her voice became reassuring. "Well, we'll see, we'll see."

"Thank you, Mother." At least, he had that much. He rose from his chair and kissed her cheek. "I have to make sure the cows have all been stalled."

With a final smile he left her, hurrying across the yard to the barn. The cows were all attended to, of course, but he stayed in the barn, driving his work-hardened fist into a grain sack again and again, while sweat beaded his forehead.

Feeling slightly ill, he gently closed the barn door behind him and sensed from the hues of the sunset and the feel of the wind that it would be a clear night. The realization filled him with equal parts of guilt and anticipation.

THE temperature was just right and the dew had left a perfect leavening of dampness in the darkness. Cott let the false door close quietly behind him and slipped noiselessly across the

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moist lawn at an angle that brought him out on the clay road, precisely at the point where his property ended and Mr. Holland's began.

He walked through the darkness with gravel shifting under his moccasins, his bandoleer bumping gently against his body, with the occasional feel of oily metal against his cheek as the carbine, slung from his shoulder, touched him with its curved magazine. It was a comforting sensation—his father had felt it before him, and his father's father. It had been the mark of a free man for each of them.

When he had come as close to Mr. Holland's house as he could without disturbing the dog, he slid into the ditch that ran beside the road. Cradling his carbine in the crooks of his bent arms, he belly-crawled silently and rapidly as close to the house as the ditch would take him.

He raised his head from behind a clump of weeds he had planted during a spring rainstorm and, using this as cover, scanned the front of the house. For any of this to be possible without the dog's winding him, the breeze had to be just right. On this night, it was.

The parlor window — perhaps the only surface-level parlor window in this area, he thought— was lighted, and *she* was in the room. Cott checked the sharp sound of his breath and sank his teeth against his lower lip. He kept his hands carefully away from the metalwork of his carbine, for his palms were sweaty.

He waited until, finally, she put out the light and went downstairs to bed. Then he dropped his head on his folded arms for a moment, eyes closed and breath irregular, before he twisted around and began to crawl back up the ditch.

Tonight, so soon after what his mother had said, he was shocked, but not truly surprised, to discover that his vision was badly blurred.

He reached the point where it was safe to leave the ditch and stood up quietly. He put one foot on the road and sprang up to the clay surface with the agility of young muscles. There was no warning of a darker shadow among the dappled splotches thrown by roadside weeds and bushes.

Mr. Holland calmly said, "Hi, boy."

LOWERING his shoulder, Cott was ready to let the carbine he had just reslung slide down his arm into his hand. He stood motionless, peering at Holland, who had stepped up silently.

"Mr. Holland!"

The old man chuckled.

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"Weren't expecting me, huh?"

Cott took a measure of relief from the man's obvious lack of righteous anger. "Good—uh—good evening, sir," he mumbled. Apparently he was not going to die immediately, but there was no telling what was going on in his neighbor's mind.

"Guess I was right about that patch of weeds springing up kind of sudden." Holland said.

Cott felt the heat rush into his ears, but he said, "Weeds, sir?"

"Pretty slick. You got the makings of a damn good combat man."

Cott was thankful for the darkness, as one embarrassment was replaced by another. The lack of light, however, did not keep his voice from betraying more than it should. Holland's implication had been clear. "My family, sir, prefers not to acknowledge former members who have sunk below their station. You will understand that under differing circumstances, I might thus consider your remark to be not flattering."

Holland chuckled. "No insult intended, son. There was a time when a guy like you wouldn't have stopped strutting for a week, after a pat on the back like that."

Cott could still feel the heat in his cheeks, and its cause over-

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rode his sharp sense of the incongruity of this midnight debate, a completely illogical circumstance which any other two men would have settled in a normal and civilized manner.

"Fortunately, sir," his voice was now at its normal pitch, "we no longer live in such times."

"*You* don't, maybe." Holland's voice was somewhat testy.

"I sincerely hope not, sir."

Holland made an impatient sound. "Boy, your Uncle Jim was the best damned rifleman that ever took out a patrol. Any family that gets snotty notions about being better than him . . . Oh, *mercy!*"

Cott recoiled from the curse. "*Sir!*"

"Excuse *me,*" Holland said sarcastically. "I forgot we're living in refined times. Not too refined, though, for a man to go crawling through ditches to sneak a look at a gal *reading a book!*" he added with contempt.

COTT felt adrenalin sweep through his bloodstream. At any moment, Mr. Holland was obviously going to exercise his right to call an affair of Integrity. Even while he formulated the various points for and against a right on his part to defend himself, even if surprised in so palpably immoral an action, his reflexes let the carbine slip down his shoulder and hang precariously from the sling which, despite careful oiling, now gave a perverse creak. Cott set his teeth in annoyance.

"I haven't got a gun on you, boy," Mr. Holland said placidly. "There's better ways of protecting your Integrity than shooting people."

Cott had long since decided that his neighbor—like all the old people who had been born in the Wild Sixties and grown up through the Dirty Years—was, to put it politely, unconventional. But the sheer lack of common sense about going unarmed into a situation where one's Integrity might be molested was more than unconventionality.

But that was neither here nor there. In such a case, the greater responsibility in carrying out the proprieties was obviously his to assume. "Allow me to state the situation clearly, sir," he said, "in order that there be no misunderstanding."

"No misunderstanding, son. Not about this situation, anyway. Hell, when I was your—"

"Nevertheless," Cott interposed, determined not to let Mr. Holland trap himself into a genuine social blunder, "the fact remains that I have trespassed on your property for a number of years—"

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"—for the purpose of peeping at Barbara," Holland finished for him. "Do me a favor, son?" Holland's voice was slightly touched by amusement.

"Certainly, sir."

"Lay off the—" Holland caught himself. "I mean show a little less concern for the social amenities. Ease up on this business of doing the right thing, come hell or high water. Here—let's sit down and let's talk over a few things."

He was neither hung nor pardoned. Cott's nerves had edged to the breaking point.

This final gaucherie was too much for him.

"I'm sorry, *sir,*" he said, his voice harsher than he intended, "but that's out of the question. I suggest you either do your duty as head of your family, or else acknowledge your unwillingness to do so."

"Why?"

The question was not as surprising as it might have been, had it come at the beginning of this fantastic scene. But it served to crystalize one point. It was not meant as a defiant insult, Cott realized. It was a genuine, sincere inquiry. The fact that Holland was incapable of appreciating the answer was proof that his mother's advice had been correct. Holland was not a gentleman.

QUITE obviously, there was only one course open to him now, if he were not to abandon all hope for Barbara's hand. Incredible as it might seem, it was to answer the question in all seriousness, in an attempt to force some understanding through the long-set habits of Mr. Holland's thinking.

"I should think it hardly necessary to remind you that a person's Integrity is his most prized moral possession. In this particular case, I have violated your daughter's Integrity and, as a result, that of your family, as well." Cott shook his head in the darkness. Explain he might, but his voice was sign enough of his outrage.

"What's that?" Holland's own voice was wearing thin.

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"*Integrity,* damn it! Give me the definition."

"Everyone knows what Integrity is, sir! That is, everyone *should* know." Cott's temper was foaming.

Holland swore in frustration. "Can't verbalize it, but you'll cut another man down for it. Or expect to be cut down. All right! Go ahead, but don't expect me to help you make a damned fool of yourself." He sighed. "Go on home, son. Maybe, in about twenty years or so, you'll get up enough guts to come and knock

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on the door like a man, if you want to see Barbara."

Through the occlusion of his almost overwhelming rage, Cott realized that now he could not say anything further which might offend Holland. "I'm certain that, if I were to do so, Miss Barbara would not receive me," he finally managed to say in an even voice, gratified at his ability to do so.

"No, she probably wouldn't," Holland said bitterly. "She's too damn well brought up—thanks to those *merciful* aunts of hers!"

He turned his back like a coward and strode off down the road.

Cott stood alone in the night, his hands clenching his bandoleer, grinding the looped cartridges together. Then he turned on his heel and loped home.

II

THE shadow coming events cast before them is pale compared to the umbra they leave behind them. It was a full generation since Berendtsen had marched his men across the face of North America, like a harrow that broke the hard root-clumps of isolated and fiercely independent survivors, and left the systematized ground ready and fertile for civilization's replanting.

It was two generations since men had fought from house to house in New York, while snipers waited patiently at apartment windows for the rich target of a man—any man whose knapsack might contain priceless ammunition and perhaps, if the hunter was lucky, food looted from the canned-goods shelves of some not-quite-completely-gutted store.

It was a full three generations since the war nobody won, when the grime of Manhattan was replaced by a deadlier dust that glowed softly in the night, that lurked avidly outside the few populated caves which remained in the agonized cliffs of Manhattan.

So Cott, as he ran for the only place where there was peace for him—toward the Integrity of his home—was only four generations removed from civilization, from the warm glow of light through farmhouse windows on soft nights in the summertime. But he was only three generations removed from a frightened, snarling, hunting and looting organism that crouched in a corner of its parquet-floored cave and fingered the bolt of its ever-present weapon.

He left his rifle on the family arms-rack in the front parlor and padded about the surface floor, resetting the alarms, inter-

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rupting himself occasionally, muscles tensed as he thought of what had happened. The incredible complexity of the problem overwhelmed him, presenting no clear face which he could attack and rationalize logically.

Primarily, of course, the fault was his. He had committed a premeditated breach of Integrity. It was in its various ramifications that the question lost its clarity.

He had spied on Barbara Holland repeatedly. Her father had become aware of the fact. Tonight, instead of issuing a direct challenge, Mr. Holland had lain in wait for him. Then, having informed Cott that he was aware of his guilt, Mr. Holland not only had not done the gentlemanly thing, but had ridiculed his expectation of it. Parenthetically, the man had insulted Cott and his family, and had derided his own daughter. He had referred to his sisters-in-law in an unbecoming manner which, if made public, would have called for a bandoleer-flogging at the hands of the male members of the female line.

Nevertheless, whether Mr. Holland was a gentleman or not, Cott had been guilty of a serious offense. And in Cott's mind, as in that of every other human being, what had been a twinging secret shame shone disastrous and disgusting as a public horror.

Since Holland had refused to solve the problem for him in the conventional manner, Cott was left with his shame.

Finally, Cott walked noiselessly down to the living quarters, uncertain of the degree of his guilt and, therefore, the extent of his disgrace. Knowing he would not be able to sleep no matter how long he lay on his bed, he fought down that part of his mind which recalled glowingly the image of Barbara Holland.

FOUGHT—but lost. The remembered picture was as strong as the others he had placed beside it, beginning with the first one five years ago when Cott had first passed her window, on his return from Graduate training. And, though he saw her almost daily at the post office or store, these special images were not obscured by the cold and proper aloofness with which she surrounded herself when she was not—he winced—alone.

Again, there was the appalling problem of Barbara's father. The man had been raised in the wild immorality and casual circumstances of the Dirty Years. Obviously, he could see nothing wrong with what Cott had been doing. He had had enough sense not to tell anyone else about it—thank the good Lord—but, in

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some blundering attempt to "Get you two kids together," or whatever he might call it, what would he tell Barbara?

Dawn came, and Cott welcomed the night's end.

As head of the family since his father's death in an affair of Integrity two years before—he had, of course, been the Party at Grievance—it was Cott's duty to plan each day's activities when they varied from normal farm routine. Today, with all the spring work done and the summer chores so light as to be insignificant, he was at loose ends —yet he was grateful for this opportunity to bury himself in a problem with which he had been trained to cope.

He devoted an hour's thinking to it and finally fell back on what, in retrospect, had been a device his father had used. If there was nothing else, there was always Drill.

Out of consideration for his grandmother's age, he waited until 07:58 before he touched the alarm stud. But not even the heavy slam of shutters being hurled into their places in the armor plate of the outer walls, the screech of the generator as the radar antennae came out of their nocturnal half-sleep into whirling life, or the clatter of the household children firing test bursts from their machine guns was enough to disturb his brooding.

The Drill lasted until 10:00. By then, it was obvious that the household defenses were doing everything they were designed for and that the members of the household knew their assignments perfectly. Even his grandmother's legendary skill with her range finder had not grown dull. There was a distinct possibility that she had memorized the range of every likely target in the area. That, if true, was not an evasion of her duties, but a valuable accomplishment.

"Very good," Cott said over the intercommunications system. "All members of the household are now free to return to their normal duties, except the children, who will report to me for training."

His mother, whose battle station was at the radarscope a few feet away from him, smiled her approval as she returned the switches to Auto Survey. She put her hand gently on his forearm as he rose from the fire control chair.

"I'm glad, Cottrell — very glad," she said, smiling.

He did not, at first, understand what she meant and looked at her blankly.

"I was afraid you might be growing neglectful of your duties, as so many of our neighbors are

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doing," she explained. "But I should not have doubted you." Her voice was strongly underlaid with pride in him. "Your fiber is stronger than that. Why, I was even afraid that your disappointment after our little talk yesterday might distract you. But I was wrong, and you'll never know how happy I am that you didn't permit it."

He bent to kiss her, then hurried to the parlor, where the children had already assembled and taken their weapons out of the arms-rack.

BY mid-afternoon, the younger children had been excused, and only his two oldest brothers were out on the practice terrain with him.

"*Stay down!*" Cott shouted at Alister. "You'll never live to graduate if you won't learn to flatten out at the crest of a rise!" He flung his carbine up to his cheek and snapped a branch beside his brother's rump to prove his point.

"Now, *you*." He whirled on Geoffrey. "How'd I estimate my windage? Quick!"

"Grass," Geoffrey said laconically.

"*Wrong!* You haven't been over that ground in two weeks. You have no accurate idea how much wind will move that grass as much as it's doing."

"Asked me how *you* did it," Geoffrey pointed out.

"All right," Cott snapped, "score one for you. Now, how *would* you do it?"

"Feel. Watch me." Geoffrey's lighter weapon cracked with a noise uncannily like that of the branch, which now split at a point two inches below where Cott's heavy slug had broken it off.

"Have an instinct for it, do you?" Cott was perversely glad to find an outlet for his annoyance. "Do it again."

Geoffrey shrugged. He fired twice. The branch splintered, and there was a shout from Alister. Cott blinked at Geoffrey. "You put it next to his hand. Guess he got some dirt in his face too."

Cott looked at the point where the grass was undulating wildly, as Alister tried to roll away under its cover. He found time to note his brother's clumsiness before he said, "You couldn't have seen his hand—or anything except the top of his rump, for that matter."

Geoffrey's seventeen-year-old face was secretly amused. "I just figured, if I was Alis, where would I keep my hands? Simple."

Cott could feel the challenge to his pre-eminence as the family's fighting man gathering thickly about him. "Very good," he said coldly. "You have an instinct for combat. Now, suppose that

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had been a defective cartridge—bad enough to tumble to the right and kill your brother. What then?"

"I hand-loaded those cases myself. Think I'm fool enough to trust that ham-handed gunsmith at the store?" Geoffrey was impregnable. Cott felt the strain of controlling his temper.

"If you're so good, why don't you go off and join the Militia?"

GEOFFREY took the insult without expression. "Think I'll stick around. You're going to need help—if old man Holland ever catches you on those little moonlight strolls of yours."

Cott's anger was mounting. "*What—did—you—say?*" The words emerged from his throat like bullets.

"You heard me." Geoffrey put a bullet to either side of the thrashing Alister, then one above and one below. Alister's training broke completely and he sprang out of the grass and began to run, shouts choking his throat. "A rabbit," Geoffrey said contemptuously. "Just pure rabbit. Me, I've got Uncle Jim's blood, but that Alis, he's genuine Mother." He fired again and snapped the heel from Alister's shoe. As Alister stumbled into the ground, Cott's open palm smashed against the side of Geoffrey's face.

Geoffrey took two sideward steps and stopped, his eyes wide with shock. The gun hung limply from his hands. It would still be several years before he would have raised it.

"You'll never mention that relative's name again!" Cott said thickly. "Not to me, not to anyone else. What's more, you'll consider it a breach of Integrity if anyone speaks of him in your presence. That understood? As for your fantasies about myself and Mr. Holland, if you mention *that* again, you'll learn there *is* such a thing as a breach of Integrity between brothers!" But he knew that everything he said was as much an admission as a shouted confession. He could feel the night's sickness seeping through his system again, turning his muscles into limp rags and sending the blood pounding through his ears.

Geoffrey narrowed his eyes. "For a guy that hates armies and soldiers, *you* sure act like a top sergeant," he said. He turned around and began to stride away, then stopped and looked back. "And I'd drop you before you got the lead out of your pants," he added.

Geoffrey knows, echoed through Cott's mind. *Geoffrey knows, and Mr. Holland found me out. How many others?* Like a sickening refrain, the thoughts tumbled over and over in his skull,

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while he swung down the road with rapid and clumsy strides. The coordination of all the muscles of his usually lithe body was non-functioning, thanks to the shock of what he had learned on the practice terrain.

He pictured Geoffrey, watching from a window and snickering as Cott crawled along the ditch. He seemed to hear Mr. Holland's dry chuckle. How many other neighbors had, over the last three years, seen him? When he thought of it, it seemed incredible that pure chance had not made the entire countryside aware of his disgraceful actions.

But he could not run from it. It was not the way a man faced situations. He should go to the club and watch the faces of the men. As they would greet him, they'd hide a little hidden demon of scorn in their eyes.

The carbine's butt slapped his thigh as he climbed the club steps.

III

HE could not be sure he had found it. Looking down at the newly refilled mug of rum, he understood this. He could not deny that a strange perverse desire to see what was not really there might have put an imagined edge on the twinkle in Winter's eye, or the undercurrent of mirth that always accented Olsen's voice. If Hollis sneered more than usual, it probably meant nothing more than that the man had discovered some new quality about himself that made him better than his fellows. Just probably, probably—with nothing certain. Neither affirmation nor denial.

Cott's hand closed around the mug, and he scalded his throat with the drink. The remembered visions of Barbara were attaining a greater precision with every swallow.

"Hello, boy."

Oh, my God! he thought. He had forgotten that Holland was a member of the club. He watched Mr. Holland slip into the seat opposite his and wondered how many dry chuckles had accompanied the old man's relating last night's events.

"How do you do, sir," he managed to say, remembering to maintain the necessary civilities.

"Don't mind if I work on my liquor at the same table with you, do you?"

Cott shook his head. "Pleasure, sir."

The chuckle came that Cott had been expecting. "Say, boy, if you'd pour a few slugs into you, you'd forget to tack on some of that fancy speech." Mr. Holland chuckled again.

"Guess I got a little sore at

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you last night," he went on. "Sorry about that. Everybody's got a right to live the way they want to."

Cott stared silently into his mug. The clarity that had begun to emerge from its depths was now unaccountably gone, as though Holland's presence was enough to plunge him headlong back into the mental chaos that had strangled his thinking through the night and most of the day. He was no longer sure that Mr. Holland had not kept the story to himself. He was no longer sure that Geoffrey had done more than make a shrewd guess . . . he was no longer sure of anything.

"Look, boy . . ."

And the thought came that, for the first time since he had known him, Mr. Holland was as unsure as he. He looked up, saw the slow light of uncertainty in the man's glance. "Yes, sir?"

"Boy—I don't know. I tried to talk to you last night, but I guess we were both kind of steamed up. Think you'll feel more like listening tonight? Particularly if I choose my words a little carefully?"

"Certainly, sir." That, at least, was common courtesy.

"Well, look—I was a friend of your Uncle Jim's."

Cott bristled. "Sir, I . . ." He stopped. In a sense, he was obligated to Mr. Holland. If he didn't say it now, it would have to be said later. "Sorry, sir, please go on."

MR. Holland nodded. "We campaigned with Berendtsen together, sure. That doesn't sit too well with some people around here. But it's true, and there're lots of people who remember it, so there's nothing wrong with my saying it.

"Jim was Matt Garvin's oldest son," Mr. Holland went on. "You can be proud of your grandfather, boy. He held half of New York's East Side together, after the war. You've been taught about that. How they were killing each other for the sake of their ammunition, and how the women either had to stick close to their men everywhere they went, or else learn to fight as well as the men. It was Matt Garvin who changed all that, from Twenty-third Street down to the Battery, all along the east side of Broadway. By the time some of those women had yearling kids, they could walk around outside in the daytime.

"One of those kids was Jim, I was another, and Ted Berendtsen was a third. When Ted started forming the Army of Unification, Jim and I went along with him."

Something that was half-reflex

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twisted Cott's mouth at the mention of the A.U.

"It had to be done the way it was, Cott," Mr. Holland said. "How else was Ted going to get a central government started among a bunch of forted-up farmers and lone-wolf nomads? Beat 'em individually at checkers? We needed a government—and fast, before we ran out of cartridges for the guns and went back to spears and arrows."

"They didn't have to do it their way," Cott said bitterly.

Mr. Holland sighed. "Devil they didn't. Besides, do you *know* exactly how it was done? Were you *there?*"

"My mother and father were. My mother remembers very well," Cott answered. Strange, how his fingers could wrap around the mug so tightly, yet no warning of the strain on bone and muscle got through to his brain.

"Yeah," Mr. Holland said dryly, "your mother was always good at remembering. Does she remember Jim's passing the land on to your father after Berendtsen gave it to him?"

Cott nodded. "Yes, sir, she does. She also remembers my uncle leading the group that wiped out her family, so that Berendtsen would have the land to give."

"I wasn't there, son, but the way I heard it, her folks were from Pennsylvania. What were *they* doing, holding down Jersey land?" He paused.

"Look, boy, it wasn't anybody's land. Her folks could have kept it, if they'd had any sense. They should've realized that all Ted wanted was for them to agree to take orders from him for a while, until there could be an election. And none of that kept her from marrying Bob Garvin."

COTT took a deep breath. "My father, sir, never fought with Berendtsen. He was the youngest of Matt Garvin's children, and he struck out for himself after his father died. He was a free man, with a sense of Integrity that did not permit him to take someone else's orders."

"He was also pretty good with that carbine. Might have had something to do with it."

"It might have, sir," Cott agreed, welcoming the feeling of pride that forced out some of his uncertainty.

Holland nodded. "He was the one who started this household defense business around here, wasn't he? Figured if a carbine could keep him free, an armored bunker could fence off his land and protect his whole family. Which wasn't a bad idea," he added. "Berendtsen unified this

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country, but he didn't exactly clean it up. That was more of a job than a man could do in one lifetime."

Holland drained his mug, put it down and wiped his mouth. "But, boy, don't you think those days are the past? Don't you think it's time we came out of the hedgehog houses and out of this hedgehog Integrity business?"

Mr. Holland put his palms on the table and caught Cott's eyes with his own. "Don't you think it's time we finished the unifying job and got us a community where a boy can walk up to his neighbor's house in broad daylight, knock on the door and say hello to a girl if he wants to?"

Cott had been listening with tangled emotions. But Holland's last words stung him and, once again, the thought of what had happened the previous night was laid bare, and all of his self-disgust with it.

"I'm sorry, sir," he said, "but I fear we have differing views on the subject. A man's home is his defense, and his Integrity and that of his family is what keeps that defense strong and inviolate. The code by which we live is one which has evolved for the fulfillment of the vital requisites for freedom. If we abandon it, we go back to the Dirty Years. And I'm afraid, sir—" he shuddered at remembrance of the outrage he had felt the previous night—"that despite your best efforts, I will still marry your daughter honorably or not at all."

Holland shook his head and smiled faintly. Cott realized how foolish that last sentence had sounded. Nevertheless, while he could not stem his impulses, he felt perfectly aware of the difference between right and wrong.

Holland stood up. "All right, boy. You stick to your system. Only—it doesn't seem to work so well for you, does it?"

Once again, Mr. Holland turned around and walked away, leaving Cott with nothing to say or do, with no foundation of assurance. It was worse than any insult.

HIS footsteps were unsteady as he crossed the club floor. The rum, combined with his sleepless night, had settled into a weight at the base of his skull. He was about to open the door when Chuck Kittredge laid a hand on his arm.

"How do you do, Garvin?" Kittredge said.

Cott smiled. Chuck was his neighbor on the side away from Mr. Holland. "How do you do?"

"You look a little tired," Chuck remarked.

"I am, Kittredge."

"Shouldn't wonder—with you

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holding Drill right at dawn."

Cott shrugged. "Have to keep the defenses in shape, you know."

Kittredge laughed. "Why, for Pete's sake? Or were you just rehearsing for the Fourth?"

Cott frowned. "Why—no, of course not. I've heard you holding Drill often enough."

His neighbor nodded. "Sure—whenever one of the kids has a birthday. But you don't really mean you were holding a genuine, dead-serious affair?"

Cott was having a little trouble concentrating. He squinted and shook his head slightly. "What's the matter with that?"

Kittredge's voice and manner became more serious. "Oh, now look, Garvin, there's been nothing for us to defend against in fifteen years. Matter of fact, I'm thinking of dismounting my artillery entirely."

Cott looked at him uncomprehendingly. "You can't be serious!"

Kittredge returned the look. "Sure."

"But you *can't*. They'd be out of machinegun range, and they'd shell you to fragments with mortars and fieldpieces. They'd knock out your machinegun turrets, close in under their rifle cover and lob grenades into your living quarters."

Kittredge laughed. He slapped his hand against his thigh while his shoulders shook. "Who the devil is '*they?*' he gasped. "Berendtsen?"

Cott felt the first touch of anger as it penetrated the deadening blanket that had wrapped itself around his thoughts.

Kittredge was still chuckling. "Come off it, will you, Cott? As a matter of fact, while I wasn't going to mention it, all that banging at your place this morning practically ruined one of my cows. Ran head-on into a fence. It's not the first time it's happened, either. The only reason I've never said anything before is because your own livestock probably has just as bad a time of it.

"Look, Cott, we're farmers. Farmers can't afford to unnerve their livestock and poison their land. It was fine while it was the only way we could operate at all, but the most hostile thing seen around here since Berendtsen's death was a chicken hawk."

The anger turned into genuine rage. Cott could feel it settling into the pit of his stomach and vibrating at his fingertips. "So you're asking me to stop holding Drill, is that it?"

KITTREDGE recognized the rasping note, and frowned. "Not *al*together, Cott. Not if you don't want to. But I wish you'd save it for celebrations."

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"The weapons of my household aren't firecrackers!"

"Aw, come *on,* Cott!"

For almost twenty-four hours, Cott had been encountering situations to which there were no solutions in his experience. He was baffled, frustrated, angry. The carbine was off his shoulder and in his hands with the speed and smoothness of motion that his father had drilled into him until it was beyond impediment by exhaustion or alcohol.

"Charles Kittredge, I charge you with attempt to breach the Integrity of my household. Load and fire."

The formula, too, was as ingrained in Cott as was his whole way of life. Chuck Kittredge knew it as well as he did. He blanched.

"You gone crazy?" It was a new voice, from slightly beyond and beside Chuck. Cott's surprised glance flicked over and saw Chuck's younger brother, Michael.

"Do you stand with him?" Cott's voice rapped out.

"Aw, now look, Cott," Chuck Kittredge said, "you're not serious about this?"

"Stand or turn your back."

"*Cott!* All I said was—"

"Am I to understand that you are attempting to *explain* yourself?"

Michael Kittredge moved forward. "Wh
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"No, he do
tredge said violently. "And I don't stand either. What kind of damned foolishness is this, anyway? People don't just pull challenges at the drop of a hat like that any more!"

"That's for each man to decide for himself," Cott answered. "Do you turn your back?"

AN ugly flush flamed in Chuck Kittredge's cheekbones. "Damned if I will." His mouth clamped into an etched white line. "All right, Cott, who goes through the door first, you or me?"

"Nobody will go anywhere. You'll stand or turn where you are."

"Right here, *in the club?* You *are* crazy!"

"You chose the place, not I. Load and fire."

Chuck Kittredge put his hand on his rifle sling. "On the count then," he said hopelessly.

Cott reslung his carbine. "One," he said.

"Two." He and Chuck picked up the count together.

"Three," in unison, again.

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had not bothered to count aloud. The carbine fell into his hooked and waiting hands and jumped once. Kittredge, interrupted in the middle of his last word, collapsed to the club floor.

Cott looked down at him and then back to Michael, who was looking at Cott incredulously.

"Do you stand with him?" Cott repeated the formula once more.

Michael shook his head dumbly.

"Then turn!"

Michael nodded. "I'll turn. Sure, I'll be a coward." There was a peculiar quality to his voice. Cott had seen men turn before, but never as though by free choice. *Except for Holland, of course,* the thought came.

Cott looked at the width of Michael's back, and reslung his carbine. "All right, Michael. Take your dead home to your household." He stood where he was while Chuck's body was hoisted over his brother's shoulder. "He was a good friend of mine, Michael. I'm sorry he forced me to do it."

As he walked home, past Mr. Holland's house, Cott did not turn his head to see if there were lights in any of the windows. He had kept his Integrity unbreached. He had forced another man to turn. But he didn't dare tell himself he hoped Barbara would understand that, in a sense, he had done it for her.

IV

TWO days later, at dinnertime, Geoffrey and Alister came in five minutes late. Geoffrey's face was wide and numb with shock, and Alister's was glowing with a rampant inner joy. It was only when Geoffrey turned that Cott saw his left sleeve was soaked in blood.

"Geoffrey!" Cott's mother pushed her chair back and ran to him. She pulled a med kit off its wall bracket and began cutting the sleeve away.

"What happened?" Cott asked.

"I got my man today," Geoffrey said, his voice as numb as his features. "He rightfully belongs to Alis, though." A grin broke through the numbness, and a babble of words came out as the shock of the wound passed from numbness to hysteria.

"That crazy Michael Kittredge climbed up a tree at the edge of the practice terrain. Had a 'scope-mounted T-4 and six extra clips. Must have figured on an all-out war. First thing I knew, it felt like somebody hit my shoulder with a bat and I was down. Slugs plowed the ground

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in circles around me. I tried to do something with my rifle, but no go. Kittredge must have had cross-eyes or something—couldn't hit the side of a cliff with a howitzer, after that first shot. Damn fool stunt, 'scope-mounting an automatic — *somebody* should have taught him better—and there I was, passing out from the recoil every time *I* squeezed. You never saw such a blind man's shooting match in your life, Cott!

"Then, out of this gully that he'd been imitating an elephant wallowing through, up pops Alis! Slaps the old M-1 to his scrawny little shoulder, stands up like the man atop a skeet-shoot trophy and starts blasting away at Kittredge's tree as if nothing was up there but pigeons! Tell you, the sight of that came nearer killing me than Kittredge's best out of thirty.

"Well, Kittredge might have been crazy, but he wasn't up to ignoring eight 30s. He swings that lunatic T-4 of his for Alis, here, and this gives me a chance to steady up and put a lucky shot through a leaf he happened to be in back of at the time. He's still out there."

Cott felt his teeth go into his lower lip. Michael Kittredge!

"He shot you from ambush?"

"He wasn't carrying any banners!"

"But that's disgraceful!" Cott's mother exclaimed. She finished wrapping gauze over the patch bandage on Geoffrey's bicep.

COTT looked at Alister, who was standing beside Geoffrey, his face still shining. "Was that what happened, Alister?" he asked.

Alister nodded.

"Sure, that's what happened!" Geoffrey said indignantly. "Think this is a mosquito bite?"

"You know what this means, don't you?" Cott asked gravely.

Geoffrey began a shrug and winced. "Fool kid with a bug."

Cott shook his head. "The Kittredges may be lax in their training, but Michael knew better. In a sense, that was a declaration of war. If Michael was out there, the rest of his household may not have known about it, but they'll be forced to support his action when they find out."

"So it's a declaration of war." Alister finally found his voice, his tones a conscious imitation of Geoffrey's. "What have we been drilling for?"

Geoffrey's eyes opened wide, and the secretive laughter returned to his expression as he looked at his younger brother.

"Not to start a war—or get involved in one," Cott said. "Their gunnery will be sloppier than ours, but I know that their

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armor plate's just as thick."

"What do you want to do, Cottrell?" his mother asked. Her delicate face was anxious, and her hands seemed to be poised for the express purpose of underscoring the question.

"We've got to stop this thing before it snowballs," Geoffrey said. "I didn't get it before, but Cott's right."

Cott nodded. "We'll have to call everybody to a meeting. I don't know what can be done about the Kittredges. Maybe we'll all be able to think of something." He beat the side of his fist lightly against his thigh. "I don't know. It's never been done before. But these aren't Berendtsen's Militia. We can't handle the problem by simply dropping our shutters and fighting it out as independent units. The whole community would wind up firing on each other. We've got to have concerted action. Perhaps, if the comunity lines up in a solid block against the Kittredges, we'll be able to block them."

"Unite the community!" His mother's eyes were wide. "Do you think you can *do* it?"

Cott sighed. "I don't know, Mother. I couldn't guess." He turned to Alister. "We're going up to the club. It's the only natural meeting place we've got. I think you'd better break out the car. The Kittredges might have more snipers out."

He picked his carbine from the arms-rack and moved to follow Alister down to the garage.

"I'll go with you," Geoffrey said. "Only takes one arm to work the turret guns."

Cott looked at him indecisively. Finally, he said, "All right. There's no telling what the Kittredges might be up to along the road." He turned back toward his mother. "I think it might be advisable to put the household on action stations." She nodded, and he went down into the garage.

THE road was open and glaring white in the sunlight of early afternoon. The armored car's tires jounced over the latitudinal ruts that freight wagons had worn into the surface. One part of his mind was worried about the effect on Geoffrey, battened down in the turret. He looked up through the overhead slits and saw the twin muzzles of the 35mm cannon tracking steadily counterclockwise.

When did it begin? he thought. The chain of recent events was clear. From the moment Mr. Holland had discovered him, four nights ago, event had followed event as plainly and inevitably as though each had been planned.

If he had not been upset by

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his meeting with Mr. Holland, he would not have called Drill the following morning. If he had never seen Barbara at her window at all, there would have been nothing for Geoffrey to taunt him with and no fear of exposure to drive him to the club. If he had not been drinking, Mr. Holland's references to Uncle James would not have cut so deep. Had there been no Drill, there would have been no quarrel with Chuck Kittredge. And even if there *had* been Drill, Chuck's remarks would not have seemed so objectionable had there been no smoldering resentment from his talk with Mr. Holland.

For he had been angry. Had he not been, Chuck and Michael would not be dead, and the Garvins would not now be in the car, trying to stop an upheaval of violence that would involve the entire community. But his anger had not been only his responsibility. A breach of Integrity remained a breach of Integrity, no matter what the subjective state of the Party at Grievance.

But where had it really begun? If his mother had introduced him to Barbara, would any of this have happened?

He rejected that possibility. His mother had been acting in accordance with the code that his father and the other free men who had settled in this area had evolved. And the code was a good code. It had kept the farmlands free and in peace, with no man wearing another's collar —until Michael Kittredge broke the code.

And, so thinking, he turned the car off the road and stopped in front of the club.

THE porch was already crowded with men. As he climbed out of the car's hatch, he saw that all the families of the community, with the exception of the Kittredges, were represented. Olsen, Hollis, Winter, Jones, Cadell, Rome, Lynn, Williams, Bridges, Van Dall—all of them. Even Mr. Holland stood near the center of the porch, his lined face graver than Cott had ever seen it.

He walked toward them. The news had spread rapidly. He remembered that a lot of the households had radios now. He had never seen any use for them before.

We ought to get one, now, though. As long as we're uniting, a fast communications channel is a good idea.

"That's far enough, Garvin!" He stopped and stared up at the men on the porch. Hollis had lifted his rifle.

Cott frowned. One or two other guns in the crowd were being

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raised in his direction.

"I don't understand," he said.

Hollis snorted. He looked past Cott at the car. "Anybody in that buggy tries something, we've got a present for him."

The men on the porch drew off to either side. Two men were crouched in the club's doorway. One held a steady antitank rocket launcher on his shoulder and the other, having fed the rocket into the chamber, stood ready to slap the top of his head for the signal to fire.

"I'm afraid I don't—"

"Looks like you've united the community, boy," Mr. Holland said. "Against you."

Cott felt the familiar surge of anger ripple through his body. "*Against* me! What for?"

There was a scattered chorus of harsh laughs.

"What about Chuck Kittredge?" Hollis asked.

"*Chuck Kittredge!* That was an affair of Integrity," Cott exploded.

"Yeah? Whose—yours or his?" Hollis said.

"Seems like the day of Integrity has come and gone, son," Mr. Holland said gently.

"Yeah, and what about Michael Kittredge?" somebody shouted from the back of the crowd. "Was that an affair of Integrity too?"

"What about those two brothers of yours shooting him out of that tree?" someone else demanded.

"Geoffrey's in the car with a wounded arm right now!" Cott yelled.

"And Michael Kittredge is dead!"

There was a babble of voices. The burst of sound struck Cott's ears. "All right!" he shouted. "*All right!* I came up here to ask you to stop the Kittredges with me. I see *they* got to you first. All *right!* Then we'll take them on alone, and the devil can have all of you!"

SOMEHOW, in the storm of answers that came from the porch, Mr. Holland's quiet voice came through.

"No good, boy. When I said 'against you,' I meant it. It's not a case of them not helping you—it means they're going to start shelling your place in two hours, whether you're in it or not."

"*No!*" The word was torn out of him, and even he had to analyze its expression. It was not a command nor a request nor a statement of fact or wonder. It was simply a word and he knew better than anyone else who heard it how ineffectual it was.

"So you'd better get your family out of there, son." The other men on the porch had fallen silent, all of them watching ex-

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cept for the two men with the rocket launcher, who ignored everything but the armored car.

Mr. Holland came off the porch and walked toward him. He put his hand on his shoulder. "Let's be getting back, son. Lots of room at my place for your family."

Cott looked up at the men on the porch again. They were completely silent, all staring back at him as though he were some strange form of man they had never seen before.

He muttered, "All right."

Mr. Holland climbed through the hatch, and Cott followed him, slamming it shut and settling into the driver's seat. He gunned the idling engine, locked his left rear wheel, spun the car around. With the motor at full gun and the dust billowing behind it, the armored car roared back down the road.

"I heard most of it, Cott." Geoffrey's tight and bitter voice came over the intercom. "Let's get back to the house in a hurry. We can dump a ton of frag on that porch before those birds find out what's hitting them."

Cott shook his head before he remembered that Geoffrey couldn't see him. "They'll be gone, Jeff. Scattered to their

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houses, getting ready."

"Well, let's hit their houses, then," Alister said from behind the machine gun at the car's turtledeck.

"Wouldn't stand a chance, son," Mr. Holland said.

"He's right. They've got us cold," Cott agreed.

What had happened to the code? His father had lived by it—all the people in the community had lived by it. He himself had lived by it—he caught himself. Had tried to live by it, and failed.

V

COTT stood in the yard in front of Mr. Holland's house. It had taken an hour and a half of the time Hollis had given him to get back to his house and move his family and a few belongings into Mr. Holland's house. He had kissed his mother and raised his hand as she turned back at the doorway. "I'll be all right, Mother," he said. "There are a few things that I'd like to attend to."

"All right, son. Don't be long."

He nodded, though she was already inside the house.

Geoffrey and Alister were deep inside Mr. Holland's house, taking care of their grandmother and the younger children. Cott smiled crookedly. Alister would be all right. He hoped Geoffrey wasn't too old to adapt.

Mr. Holland came out. "Coming in, son?" He chuckled. "I'll introduce you to my daughter."

Barbara. He looked at the Sun. No, not enough time. Well, there'd be plenty afterward.

"I'll be back, Mr. Holland. Got a few loose ends to tie up."

Holland looked over the low, barely visible roof of Cott's house.

A small dustcloud was approaching it from the other side. He nodded. "Yeah, I see what you mean. Well, hurry up. You haven't got more than about twenty minutes."

Cott nodded. "I'll see you." He dropped the carbine into his hand and loped out of the yard, not having to worry about the dog now, cutting through the low underbrush until he was just below

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the crest of a rise that overlooked his house. He flattened himself in the high grass and inched forward, until his head and shoulders were over the crest, but still hidden in the grass.

He had been right. There were three men just climbing out of a light guncarrier.

Looters, he thought. *Well, that's what our grandparents were.* He slipped the safety. *And our parents had a code.* And now, his brothers had a united community. *But I've lived in the past all my life, and I guess I've got Integrity.*

He fired, and one of the men slapped at his stomach and fell.

THE other two dived apart, their own rifles in their hands. Cott laughed and threw dirt into their faces with a pair of shots. One of them bucked his shoulders up involuntarily as the dirt flew into his eyes. Cott fired again, and the shoulders slumped. *Thanks for a trick, Geoffrey.*

The other man fired back—using half a clip to cut the grass a foot to Cott's right. He dropped back below the crest, rolled and came up again, ten feet from where he had been.

Down by the house, the remaining man moved. Cott put a bullet an inch above his head.

He had about ten minutes. Well, if he kept that man pinned down, the first salvo would do as thorough a job as any carbine shot.

The man moved again—a little desperately this time—and Cott tugged at his pants leg with a snap shot.

Five minutes, and the man moved again. He was shouting something. Cott turned his ear toward him to cut the hum from the breeze, but couldn't make out the words. He pinned the man down again.

When he had a minute of life left, the man tried to run for it. He sprang up suddenly, running *away* from the guncarrier, and Cott missed him for that reason. When the man cut back, he shot him through the leg.

Damn! Jeff could have done better than that!

The man was crawling for the carrier.

Over at the Kittredge's, the first muzzle-flashes flared, and the thud of the guns rolled over the hills.

Cott put a bullet through the crawling man's head.

He had been right about the Kittredges' poor gunnery, as he had been about the looters. The first salvo landed a hundred yards over—on the very crest of the ridge where Cott was standing, his carbine in his hand. Poor shooting, but just as fatal.

—ALGIS BUDRYS

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The MERCHANTS Of Venus

A pioneer movement is like a building—the foundation is never built for beauty!

By A. H. PHELPS, Jr.

THE telephone rang. Reluctantly, Rod Workham picked it up. Nothing good had come from that phone in six years, and his sour expression was almost an automatic reflex.

"Workham here," he said.

He held the phone an inch away from his ear, but the tirade exceeded his expectations — it would have been audible a foot away:

"Workham! How long do you think we're going to stand for this! At the rate you're going, there won't be a man left on Venus or a dollar in the budget! What kind of a personnel director are you? Don't you know this project is vital to every person on Earth? Thirty more resignations came in on this last mail flight."

Rod put the receiver gently on his desk. General Carlson raved and ranted this way every time a colonist quit, and Rod knew he was not expected to answer, even if given the chance. The general would carry on for about five minutes and then would slam down the phone himself.

Illustrated by FREAS

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He dialed another number on the other phone.

"This is Rod, Dave," he said when he got an answer. "Carlson is on the other phone, yelling at my desk blotter. He says thirty more resignations came in just now. That right?"

"Close enough, Rod — twenty-three pulled out. That makes seventy-eight per cent resigned in less than—"

"Spare me the statistics—Carlson's probably blatting them right now. How do they break down? Are they mostly farmers or technicians?"

"There were only nine technicians left, and all of them quit with this bunch. The rest were farmers." Dave Newson must be smoking his pipe, Rod decided—grinding sounds were coming over the phone. "That doesn't leave very much on Venus to start a colony with—a few farmers, some trappers. And the scientific personnel—damn it, they seem to stick it out all right—"

"Their contracts are different," Rod reminded him. "They go on a two year hitch and then come back to Earth if they want to. The ones who are there are the ones who can take it and are signed up again."

THERE was a speculative pause on the other end of the line. "Say, Rod," Newson said slowly. "Why not leave this last batch of quitters right where they are? Every one of them. They signed up for the project with their eyes open. Why don't you just refuse to bring them home? . . . they'd have to make a go of the colony to save their filthy necks!"

Rod grinned nastily. "I'd like to do it—but even General Carlson wouldn't dare. We'd never get another colonist off Earth, once it got out. They wouldn't trust us. Our first problem is to get a self-supporting society on Venus—and that might do it, all right. But our main job is to relieve the crowding on Earth, and that means large numbers of people will have to go willingly later on. If we get tough with these babies, who will take a chance later on that we won't repeat the trick?"

"But we lose a hundred potential colonists every time one of these quitters starts talking about why he left! More harm is done by letting them come back than would result from leaving them where they are." Again the speculative pause. "Maybe you could shoot them on arrival?"

"I'll suggest it to the general when I see him," Rod said, "if he doesn't shoot me first. Now, can you get me the files on this latest group? And I'd like to see the staff psychologist here, along

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with all the interviewers who handled and passed the group. We'll see what we can salvage out of this. And if you see Jaimie, send him along too, will you? Maybe our gambling historian can find us something useful in the Project Record."

"The files are already on the way. And I told Biddington you'd probably want to see him—he said he'd be along in about ten minutes. I haven't located all the interviewers yet. Jaimie's been right here, trying to talk me into a game of Nim and protesting he never heard of binary numbers. I'll send him up, but keep your hand on your wallet. If you need anything else, I'll be right here."

ROD thanked him and hung up, shaking his head. Dave Newsom was too good a man to be stuck on a government project—he ought to get out before the trouble started. Anyone who worked for Rod Workham on Project Venus was likely to end up with a bad name. They lived under the ax. The only person who could be sure of his job was Rod himself. He'd been recommended by a committee of top men in his field, and no other personnel man would accept the job if he were removed. Also, most of his men would leave the project if General Carlson bounced him, for they had been telling him so ever since the job had gotten hot.

But there was the danger that the general might decide to bypass Personnel in selecting colonists—or, what was more probable, might try to tame the planet with a military outpost.

Rod could hardly blame the man for his feelings. The job was vital, and everyone was intensely interested in making a go of it. Scientific agriculture had gone about as far as it could; hydroponics had already begun to shoulder the load required by an overpopulated planet. But the fact known to most intelligent people on Earth was that either new room was found in this kind of emergency, some place where people could go and live under nearly the same standards, or else some drastic changes in living standards would be required of all. And absolute and rigidly enforced birth control would have to go into effect. And all the attendant causes for race wars, nationalist wars, and have-not wars would crop up.

But the majority of the people wouldn't move to an undeveloped planet. You couldn't send ordinary citizens as pioneers. For one thing, they wouldn't want to go. For another, the new community wouldn't last long if you forced them to go—the average

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person had neither the attitudes nor the physique needed to make over a wilderness.

The problem was to find people who would create a community on a new planet and develop an integrated society there. This had meant rigid selection, careful psychological preparation and a terrifically expensive transportation system to get the people there and keep them supplied. And the job had to be done soon. Economists predicted that thirty years were left on Earth under present standards, maybe fifty. If the population couldn't be thinned out one way by then, it would have to be done by another.

FOR six years, now, Rod had worked on the job of establishing a self-supporting colony on Venus. Three different colonies had been started, and each had died out in less than two years. Resignations would come in slowly at first, and then in a rush, until only twenty or thirty people would be left, of which the majority would be short-term scientific teams. By the terms of the colonists' contracts no man could be left on Venus more than a month after his resignation; so the bulk of two colonies had simply had to be shipped back to Earth, and plans made for another try.

And now the third colony was quitting, rushing home, leaving nothing on the jungle planet but a few small clearings soon to be taken over by the vegetation.

Several times in the last year Rod had thought of volunteering himself; but he knew it for a futile gesture. He wasn't five hundred men. He didn't even have the special skills or physique that were needed.

His gloomy thoughts were interrupted by the arrival of the men.

Biddington was first. Then, in twos and threes came the interviewers, all looking like the home team at the half, three touchdowns behind and just waiting for their coach.

If psychologists made good colonists, Rod thought, here would be a dozen more volunteers.

The arrival of Homer Jaimison brought the only cheerful face in the group. The project historian was a young man, just over thirty, and considerably over six feet. He wore the expression of a man who is itching to do something. Jaimie had never really been busy yet on the project—the colonies had died out so quickly that his work had been mostly clerical, and he'd had to fill in time as best he could. So far he had done it making up improbable contests

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of skill for drinks, with such a weird assortment of shifting rules and scoring that he hadn't paid for a drink since his arrival. He made a valuable contribution to the project, however, since he helped to keep the group's minds off their troubles a part of the time.

Rod genuinely liked Jaimie, and expected to miss him strongly when Venus became self-supporting to the point where the historian would have to complete his work in residence.

WHEN they were all seated, Rod leaned against his desk and said, "I can see you all know why we're here. To begin with, I'm not going to accuse anyone of mistakes. Each of you is the best possible man in the country for his job. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here. I wouldn't have asked for you; and General Carlson wouldn't have kept you. So there's nothing to feel bad about. If you can't do this work, no one can. Self-recrimination is foolish when you've been put on an impossible problem. I didn't call you in to bawl you out, but to ask you if we should continue spending project funds for nothing."

Jaimie raised his eyebrows at this speech, but said nothing.

"What do you mean, impossible problem?" one of the interviewers objected. "We know what we need—it's just that we're still making some mistake in selection that we haven't corrected."

"That's right, Rod." Biddington, the project psychologist, took up the dissension. "We know something is wrong with the selection techniques, or in the personality patterns we consider necessary. But it's only a problem of finding out what it is. The problem is by no means insoluble."

"As long as you're not ready to give us up," another interviewer said, "we aren't going to quit."

"You can't afford to get defeatist about this, Rod," Biddington went on. "This project is too important to fail. Whether you like it or not, your experience is too valuable for you to back out."

Rod grinned and held up his hands. "All right. That's the reaction I wanted. If you all still think we can get somewhere, we may as well try to analyze this last group." He sat down at his desk. "I have the files here, along with the tapes of the interviews. Let's see what difference we can find between those who hung on this long, and the ones that quit after the first three months."

THE group settled down to trying to differentiate between a man who couldn't do a job

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but could try for six months longer than the next. They took the colonists carefully apart, trait by trait, and put them all back. They reviewed the colonists' records from birth, and compared them in endless combinations. Jaimie came into the discussion to show what the status of the colonies had been at the time each colonist had resigned: what diseases had been encountered when one man quit; how much jungle had been cleared before another did.

Files came and went in a continuous flux; coffee and sandwiches came and grew cold and stale. The air became gray with smoke.

Nothing.

The same results had come out of every investigation: You needed a man who was unstable to get him to leave Earth. You needed a man who was stable to have him stay on Venus. You needed initiative and resourcefulness to survive on a new planet. You needed a man who had so little initiative and resourcefulness that the competition on Earth wouldn't be profitable. You needed a young, healthy, vigorous specimen. You needed an older, experienced, more mature person.

You needed A and you needed non-A.

And even if you found people with the factors balanced just right, assuming you knew what the balance should be, where did you find five hundred of them?

The discussion went on. The solutions got wilder and more absurd. Take whole orphan asylums and bring them up on Venus under military guard. Build a development in the steamiest, nastiest jungle, and test recruits for the colony there. Send African natives.

The men were beginning to make the whole thing look impossible again, so Rod decided to call a halt until they could get a better perspective. Tired himself, he dismissed them. They left quietly, not arguing in little groups or mumbling half-formed ideas to themselves, the way a team that has been progressing will do.

ONLY Jaimie stayed. He remained sitting hunched up near the desk, in the same position he'd held for the last hour. When the others had all left, he grinned at Rod.

"You know, for a group of practicing psychologists, this is the softest bunch of suckers I've seen."

"You've proved that to your own profit several times so far," Rod answered, rubbing his face as though smoothing the wrinkles could remove the tension. "Who have you robbed lately?"

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"I'm talking about your performance just now. Here comes the whole crew, walking in with their heads hanging to the floor. Every last man was ready to tell you he was quitting—that the problem was insoluble. And before anyone can say a word, you tell them that the whole thing is impossible and imply that *you* want to quit. Even Biddington fell for it. You can't back out now, Rod, they say. Let's not have defeatist talk out of you, of all people—"

"I did feel that way," Rod said. "I'm just about ready to quit. I think that whatever our mistake has been, we can't do any better than we have. We just don't know enough."

Jaimie wasn't grinning now. "What will happen if you quit?"

"My guess is that Carlson will set up a military outpost there. Make a clearing, build a fort, maybe a town. Then he'll try to get people to come and live in it." Rod sighed. "It won't work. They'll want to know why the planet had to be colonized that way—why wouldn't the *first* colonists stay?"

"I agree. The military outpost is a fine method for spreading a culture to an existing civilization. Rome did much for Europe that way; the most powerful cities sprang up near the Roman forts and roads. But as a method for inducing the populace to a new place, it doesn't work. A free people will not willingly move into a military township." Jaimie looked sharply at Rod. "So what do you intend to do—run out and turn it all over to Carlson?"

"I don't know, Jaimie. I just don't know. Six years is a long time."

"Damn it, Rod, you had much worse jobs than this one in industry! How did you select a computer man, a communications man, an engineering physicist, out of a group of men with similar backgrounds? It seems to me a harder problem than this."

"We don't really know much, as I said," Rod said. "Ours has often been an imitation science. When we had to select a computer man, we just gave a battery of tests to successful computer men — structural vision, vocabulary, tri-dimensional memory, ink-blots, syllogisms, practically everything. Then we weeded out the tests whose scores appeared to have no statistical relevance. Any future computer man had to duplicate those results, whatever they were. If we had a recently pioneered civilization around, Jaimie, you'd find this whole staff running through it like pollsters before an election."

"What was all this talk about balance, instability, initiative and

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all the rest?" asked Jamie.

"That's what we do when we don't know, Jaimie. We try to predict what we need; then we try to find ways of finding it in people."

JAIMIE made an explosive sound. "But I thought you *must* have progressed from empirical methods! I would have said something long ago, if I hadn't thought you knew what you were doing all the time!" The historian was on his feet, stalking about the room. "Why didn't you tell me about this before?"

"Why? What difference would it have made?" Rod frowned, failing to understand the other's excitement. "Sure, we've progressed from the older methods, in that we now have pretty complete data for all present job descriptions. And we can synthesize data for a new job, if it's not too different. But there isn't any information on the kind of person needed in a new world. What the devil are you getting so upset about?"

The historian threw himself into a chair and glared at Rod. "If you couldn't find the kind of people you needed to test, you could have asked a historian if he knew anything about them!"

Rod shook his head puzzledly. "Subjective data, such as that—"

"Don't bring subjectivity into this, damn it! We get enough of that from physical scientists." Jaimie held himself in the chair, almost shaking with the intensity of his feeling. "Look, Rod, you know I want to see the project succeed. And you admit that you haven't got an answer. Well, baby, I think I have! It's an idea that has about a fifty-fifty chance of being right in this case . . . would you be willing to try it?"

"If I had been betting on your side for the last few months, I'd be several dollars richer," Rod smiled. "Yes, I think I might go along with your idea, if you can convince me it has an even chance for success. Three failures out of three tries makes for poorer odds than that. What do you have in mind?"

"H'm," Jaimie said. "I imagine your stock isn't so high with old scabbard and blade right now, is it?"

Rod laughed. "I don't think he'll shoot on sight, but I'm not positive enough to stand in front of a lighted window."

"Well, then—if I had an idea you agreed with, the surest way to kill it would be to have you present it to him, right? And if you *fight* it, that's sure to convince Carlson!" Jaimie thought hard for a moment, tapping the chair-arm. "Rod, I have to do

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something you aren't going to like. Do you trust me?"

"You mean you're going to try this without even discussing it with the personnel group?"

"That's right. If I don't tell you what I'm doing, I know you'll fight it. And I'll need that kind of help from you to push Carlson into doing it.

"But I have to do something far worse than that, Rod. I'm going to tell the general that you knew my plan from the start, and have been sitting on it because I'm not a psychologist. I'm going to ruin your reputation with the worst set of lies since the Red purges. I'll say you're fighting me, because you can't accept an idea that came from a man outside of your own group. If the scheme doesn't work you'll be ruined, because there'll be no way to retract the lies. If it does work, we can announce that we put on an act to sell the plan to Carlson. Can you take it?"

Rod was thoughtful for a few minutes. He liked and trusted Jaimie, but the man had no experience in this field—and this sounded like an all-or-nothing shot.

Then he remembered his despair over the latest set of resignations. He'd been ready to quit—he had nothing to offer, and neither did his men. Even a wild idea was worth a try, he thought grimly—he would be risking nothing but a plan that had already failed.

"Go to it, boy," he said. "And if you need a fight, you'll get a damn good one."

THE fight with Carlson was short, and Rod was abruptly overruled. After that Jaimie moved fast. The new colonists flocked in. Three months after Rod's talk with him, the compounds started to fill. A shipload was a hundred men, and each new man had to wait in a group until it was filled. But there was no waiting now except for processing; the compounds were full before the ships were ready.

Rod had paid no attention to Jaimie's recruiting methods, thinking that the historian's idea differed mainly in control over the colonists.

Until he saw the crowds.

Even from a distance, they didn't have the young look of the previous groups. Up close, they looked like the sweepings of the slums.

He and Biddington talked to a few before they fully realized what Jaimie had done. All the men were sure that Venus was a mineral paradise—gold in the streams, uranium lodes so pure you had to wear a shield to get near them, diamonds, silver—every treasure that had ever ex-

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cited men on Earth was scattered around the new world waiting to be picked up. That was what Jaimie had told them.

Rod got to a phone, fast.

"Jaimie, you fool! I know what you're doing, and I won't put up with it! You've told these dupes they can get rich on Venus! You intended to attract large numbers of recruits, in the hope that some of them will be what we need—but look at what you attracted! Crooks, gangsters, bums, hoboes, sharecroppers and I don't know what. You got recruits all right . . . but what the hell kind of a society are you going to start with them! And who will go and live there among them later?"

"What's the matter, Workham?" Jaimie asked coldly. "Are you a racial purist? Want only your kind of people to get to Venus?"

"I don't care *who* goes, as long as they fit some standards. But to make a decent place, you need decent people—morally clean and healthy. Not this collection of mental cripples, alcoholics and thieves. Probably half of them are wanted men!"

He argued further, unable to believe that this was Jaimison's great fifty-fifty chance. He said many things . . . and regretted every one; for that night the telecasts carried a recorded version of his outburst. Jaimie had maneuvered him into saying things he didn't quite mean, so that it looked as if he was trying to hide the all good things on Venus and save them for his own friends. One commentator said outright that if you weren't a college graduate recommended by one of Workham's friends, it would cost you a thousand dollars to get on an outgoing ship. By the next morning, half the papers in the world were after Workham's scalp.

ROD could only take the abuse and grind his teeth. How did you fight a thing like that? You were condemned if you kept silent, and if you answered, people nodded their heads and said, "See—he's still trying to deny it."

The failures from the old colonies were Rod's only allies. They tried to tell people what Venus was like, and what lies Carlson and his stooge Jaimison were using for bait. But it was pointed out that these men naturally had a stake in the secret . . . and, after all, everyone knew how well off the returning colonists were! This was actually due to the high premium paid to get men to go to the planet, but no one believed.

Days passed. Weeks. The compounds filled, and emptied, and filled again. People stood in lines to apply. They walked miles to

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appear at a recruiting center. They fought for a place on the next ship, or the one after that. Farmers, clerks, ragged families, hoboes, armed men, teen-age boys and old men. Four thousand people applied in the first few months and were shipped out. Then the crowds thinned, even though the Get Rich propaganda continued. Soon, only a few hundred appeared where there had been thousands; then twos and threes; at last only a dozen or so a day, many of whom changed their minds before the full shipload had been assembled.

Rod clung to his job throughout. He had little to do, though his department had never been formally discontinued. Sooner or later, he knew, their services would be needed—when this cheap trick had failed. So he and his staff remained. Studying old files, making up test batteries, discussing survival factors, they readied themselves for the project again. From time to time they interviewed and tested a few of those waiting in the compounds. There was too much time to just sit around—even this activity was a welcome diversion.

As the year passed, the number of prospective colonists stopped decreasing and held steady at about five a day. But slowly something else changed. Among the new arrivals there began to appear engineers who had tossed up good jobs to emigrate, farmers with their families, schoolteachers, storekeepers, lawyers, even doctors. All of them young. Not in any great number; but their appearance was a surprise still. Then there came two former colonists who had resigned on one of the earlier attempts, now trying to get back to Venus without inducement of bonus, high pay or guaranteed return.

That was the day Rod decided to call on Jaimie.

"I HAVE here a bottle of eight-year-old rye, Jaimie," he began. "I think you're entitled to a drink, and I'm entitled to an explanation. Want to swap?"

"Rod!" Jaimie's bony face lit up. "It's good to see you. I've been afraid to call you until we could admit to the hoax. Come in, come in."

"Well, you did it," Rod said, after they had settled down. "I met two former colonists in the compound today. They know there isn't gold on Venus, and still they want to go out for free. No contract. And lately we've been getting professional people. There was even a kid fresh out of journalism school who wants to start up a paper. Jaimie, how did you do it? Were we so far wrong as that?"

"You did it yourself, Rod. You

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told me how—but you wouldn't have believed, then. Or if you had, we never would have sold it to Carlson. Remember, you said if there were only a recent pioneer civilization around, you'd run to them with ink-blots and vocabulary tests? All you needed to do was duplicate the kind of person who settled America or Australia or California.

"Well, as a historian I *knew* those people. And I knew what brought them. So I merely put out the same kind of bait."

"The same kind of bait!" Rod exclaimed. "What about freedom of religion and freedom from oppression? Isn't that what brought people to this country? There's no oppression to flee from these days! And even if it was the same bait, why weren't the same kind of people attracted? You saw that first compound full—where in that cesspool was Thomas Paine, or Franklin, or Miles Standish?"

"Franklin was born here," Jaimie grinned. "Paine didn't come over in the first wave. And I suppose General Carlson was Miles Standish. Maybe that kid journalist you saw was Paine's counterpart. No, Rod—the bait I held out attracted the same kind of people initially as it always has. You have been compromising all along on the factors you really wanted in order to get young, healthy, moral people to Venus. The answer is simply this: Pioneers are not necessarily young, healthy, or moral. So you didn't get what you wanted.

"You see, America wasn't only founded by pilgrims. They were actually a minority here. We were settled by promoters, trappers, bonded servants, exiled British deportees, pickpockets and thieves. We were explored by French and Spanish pirates. The better element in Europe didn't come here at first—why should they? It was dangerous. Pioneering was to the advantage of the worst elements. They came by court order, out of necessity, for adventure. They came for gold more than for freedom; for a new chance more than for a new religion.

"Australia was set up as a penal colony. Others went there for gold, or to start over where they weren't known. That's the kind of person who settles a new land—the misfits: too impulsive, drunkards, weaklings, convicts, and fugitives from justice. Too sick in mind and body to make a go of it where they are.

"So we announced that there was a brand new world with a new chance for everyone on it. We implied that there was wealth. We told them everything about Venus that brought the English to America, the Spanish

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to South America, the Easterners to the West, and the Middlewesterners to California. We didn't hunt for pioneers. They came to us."

ROD refilled his glass thoughtfully. "But what kind of a society will men like that create? A fighting, lawless structure . . ."

"That's right. And the lawless will eliminate themselves by their very activities. Like the early West. While the doctors come in to treat wounds, and the lawyers to plead their cases; while their wives and the other wives will start schools and bring in schoolteachers. That society will purge itself, Rod—many of the worst will become good citizens out of meeting the challenge of a new planet, and the rest will disappear."

"Well, then, what about the gold story?" Rod asked. "Won't they be angry with everyone connected with the project because of the hoax?"

"That was a little raw, but no worse than other gold rushes—few of the stampeders ever found the gold they went after. The captain of one of the rockets told me that the first few months the colonists were trying to stow away on the returning ships. Now they send messages to friends and relatives to come before the opportunity is gone—that's why you've seen this better element. Our lies will soon be forgotten, and crops and foods and minerals will be coming from Venus, and better people will go to meet the diminished challenge on our brave new world."

Rod stood up. "Well, my compliments for a job well done, Jaimie. When do you expect to go and live there yourself? You'll have to soon, won't you, to complete the Project Record in residence?"

Jaimie nodded. "About six months from now, I think. Why?"

"Good," Rod exclaimed. "We can all go together."

"What are you planning to do? Volunteer?"

"The whole personnel staff will be going. Here's just what we need—a young pioneer society! We can get adequate data for future selection, a better idea of what kind of person a colony needs at different stages of growth." Rod grinned. "After all, your method was pretty sloppy, even if it did work. And you sent far too many wrong people. Once we have some good data . . . anything you can do, we can do better!"

—A. H. PHELPS, JR.

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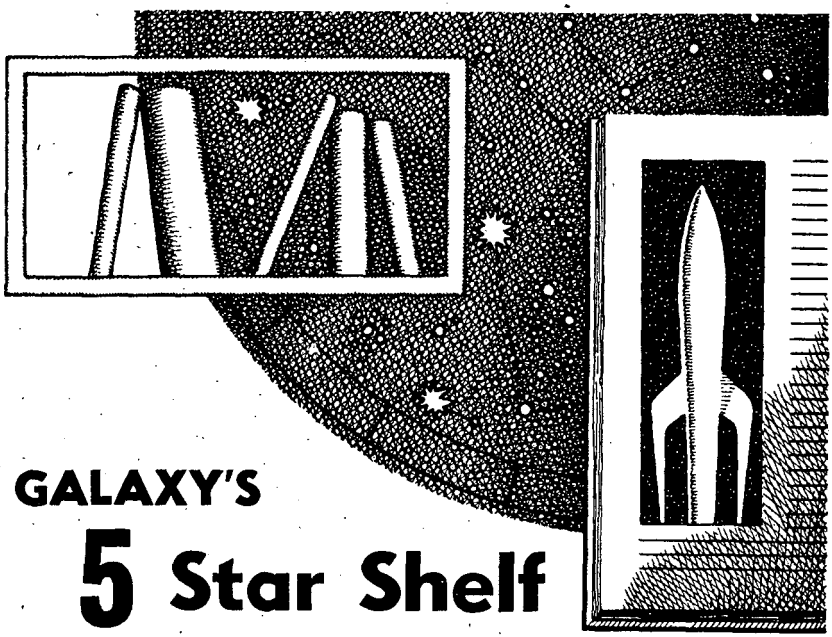

GALAXY'S 5 Star Shelf

ONE by David Karp. Vanguard Press, New York, 1953. 311 *pages,* $3.50

CONCERN about the nature of the World of Tomorrow is a recurrent theme in science fiction. Last month we had Bradbury's *Fahrenheit* 451; this month come Kornbluth's satirically odd *Syndic,* reviewed below, and Karp's shocking novel about a civilization in which independent thinking is heresy, punishable by death if the person cannot be "cured" by the vicious methods of pharmaceutical psychiatry.

You may not enjoy reading Karp's first novel—it is hardly time-passing entertainment—but you certainly will find it gripping and unforgettable.

It concerns Professor Burden, a benevolent spy in his college, who reports to the State on what he considers to be his colleagues' "heresies," or errors of free thinking. Burden is called in by the State's thought control agency and is himself found to be suffering from the mortal heresy of individualism and belief in his intellectual superiority. He is incarcerated and put through one

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of the most horrid courses of depersonalization I have ever read about. His individuality is literally destroyed and a new personality — slavishly acquiescent — is built up. The end, however, indicates that the job of eliminating independence and obtaining conformity is not as easy as the State leaders hope it is.

The book is written in a style simple enough to permit both people and ideas to shine through in all their luridness, yet individual enough to shine through by themselves.

One was a Book of the Month Club alternate selection for October.

THE SYNDIC by C. M. Kornbluth. Doubleday and Co., New York, 1953. 223 *pages,* $2.95

WHERE *One* is a study of psycho-sociological horror, Kornbluth's is rip-roaring melodrama of the future. Yet underlying it, too, is a bitter analysis of some of the trends in modern society, more fantastic than in Karp's book, but not much less ominous.

Kornbluth conceives of a society in which government, with its increasing tendency to conformity, militarism and bureaucracy, has been driven from the United States by two sets of gangsters. In the West, centered on Chicago, is Mob territory, with a civilization based on the violence of gang war. In the East, the Syndic has evolved a way of life in which the customs of the gambler, the horse parlor operator, the easy-virtue girl, the Tammany-type politician have become the accepted mores. It is a time when, as the jacket blurb puts it, "people never had it so good," (in Syndic territory, at least).

The plot concerns an attempt by one of the lowlier members of the Syndic itself to become a spy on the activities of the Government forces, which conduct their piratical activities from bases in Iceland, Ireland and elsewhere in those regions. He goes through innumerable fetching and farfetched adventures, both alone and with an attractive girl psychologist, and eventually discovers that there is a sort of shotgun alliance between Government and Mob forces to overthrow the Syndic.

The payoff is remarkable both for its inconclusiveness and for its surprisingly philosophical depth—an ending rich with lessons for our time.

AN INTRODUCTION TO SYMBOLIC LOGIC by Susanne K. Langer. 2nd ed., revised. Dover Publications, New York, 1953. 367 *pages, Cloth* $3.50, *paper* $1.60

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I AM told by experts in Symbolic logic that this is far and away the best simple introduction to what is today one of the most important new tools of scientific thought, a way of clear reasoning unsurpassed by any previous system. It is not at all difficult to read and it seems to strengthen and clarify one's thought processes quite remarkably.

The book's value can best be summarized by quoting from the author's introduction: "It emphasizes . . . above all the difference between fecund and sterile notions . . . It seeks to show the bearing of logic on natural science and philosophy of nature. . . . It aims to take no technical knowledge of logic, mathematics or science for granted, but to develop every idea from the level of common sense."

For anyone interested in learning about one of the newer techniques of basic science, this book will prove a fascinating and useful tool. And, from my own point of view, I found it intellectually exciting, a real test of some of the relatively unused muscles under the scalp.

MORE THAN HUMAN by Theodore Sturgeon. Farrar, Straus and Young, New York, and Ballantine Books, New York, 1953. 256 pages, $2.00 cloth, 35c paper

FEW people who read Sturgeon's "Baby Is Three" in the October 1952 GALAXY will ever forget its imaginative evocation of *Homo gestalt,* that astonishing five-person "person" consisting of Janie, the little girl telekineticist-telepathist; the Negro twins, Bonnie and Beanie, natural-born teleporteurs; Baby, the idiot savant computer; and Gerard, the boy who coordinated this odd group into a cooperating unit that could do *anything.*

The present book is the full flowering of this magically imagination-stretching concept. It consists of (in addition to "Baby Is Three") a new first section telling how the unit originated with Lone, the "natural" who could never fully develop the new unit because he was simple in the head, and a new last section that describes how Hip Barrows, mentally disturbed war veteran, finally manages to bring Gerard —who could not understand the need for morality or ethics in his function as "boss" of the *Homo gestalt* unit—to an understanding of his responsibilities.

The new parts are fully as impressive as the original. The whole book is a masterpiece of invention.

It is something of a relief to find a piece of science fiction that is concerned more with odd but astonishingly real people and

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with parapsychology maturely used than with hopeless mobs and violent disaster. It is also a pleasure to read a book that is written in an unmannered prose that still has a poetic, panchromatic individuality. And not least, it is very rewarding indeed to come across an idea that is not only unique, but also richly human.

Sturgeon's second full-length novel has more than fulfilled the promise shown by his many masterly short stories.

SHADOW OF TOMORROW, edited by Frederik Pohl. Permabooks, New York, 1953. 379 *pages,* 35c

I NOTICE a tendency on the part of us reviewers to become blase and overcritical when we report on anthologies—particularly the paper-bound bargains at 35c, like this one. So every story is not an immortal classic? What do you want for the price? Here, for example, we have 17 really good stories — and where else can you get the same amount of acceptable reading matter for 2c a story?

This particular book, though, is less necessary for the GALAXY reader than for those not familiar with our magazine, since 11 of its 17 items come from the GALAXY backfile.

I won't name every story because of space limitations, but consider that it includes Heinlein's "Year of the Jackpot," Asimov's "C-Chute," Kornbluth's "Marching Morons," Boucher's "Transfer Point," Clement's "Halo," and Eisner (Kornbluth)'s "Luckiest Man in Denv"—what a list of star items!

Also John Wyndham's "Perfect Creature" and Blish's "Common Time"—both fine non-GALAXY tales. And the rest, though not quite up to this top level, are all good reading, both for the convinced fan and the science fiction newcomer.

No stories published before 1950 are included, which does not mean that there are no fine tales from that earlier period still to be anthologized. This is not intended as criticism, only as a passing comment.

ASSIGNMENT IN ETERNITY by Robert Heinlein. Fantasy Press, Reading, Pa., 1953. 256 *pages,* $3.00

HERE are four of Heinlein's rather minor efforts, every one of them highly readable, but none measuring up to his best work.

"Gulf" (1949) deals with a struggle between a "good" underground of *Homo superiors,* complete with telepathy, etc., and

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a bunch of "bad" rulers in a world of tomorrow. It is full of swift-paced excitement.

"Elsewhen" (1941) is an odd, anti-scientific parallel-world tale based to some degree on Bishop Berkeley's absurd notions. I found it pretty ineffective.

"Lost Legacy" (1941) is another story of parapsychological powers, common now, but rather rare when it was written. Its time is today. Like "Gulf," it deals with a "totipotent" (to use a van Vogtian word) group of concealed geniuses (one of them is Ambrose Bierce!) who are trying to train suitable people to use their "whole minds" to subdue the evil leaders of Man who seek power and power only. It is effective, despite the dreamlike nature of its plot and especially its characterizations.

"Jerry Was a Man" (1947) tells of a society in which mutated monkeys do the world's work, and how a fantastic millionairess with a soft heart gets them recognized legally as people. It is a delightful story, with its jabs at pomposity and its understanding of what Man basically is — a being who can understand the difference between right and wrong.

THE SKY BLOCK by Steve Frazee. Rinehart and Co., Inc., New York, 1953. 247 *pages,* $2.75

STEVE FRAZEE has written a taut suspense novel with science fiction overtones about some unnamed enemies of the American Way who try to panic the country by stopping rain. We learn nothing about the nature of the drought-making equipment, except that it is electronic, but we get an almost palpable feeling of the terror, the sense of doom, that its effects produce.

Somewhere in Colorado or thereabouts is a mountain called Blue Peak. Platt Vencel, who was brought up there, returns after the war for a vacation, to find the whole area in the grip of an unprecedented drought. Before long, he is involved in a frenzied and ruthless campaign by the Army, the F.B.I., the F.C.C., etc., to bring out alive the hidden enemies holed up somewhere in the center of Blue Peak and their rain-preventing equipment. The task is made almost impossibly difficult by the conflicting authorities of the different agencies and by the knowledge that any man on the hunt may be a traitor.

The middle of the book sags, perhaps because it is impossible to maintain continuous excitement in a situation where there can be but little open conflict. On the whole, however, I think you will find this a satisfyingly spine-chilling tale.

—GROFF CONKLIN

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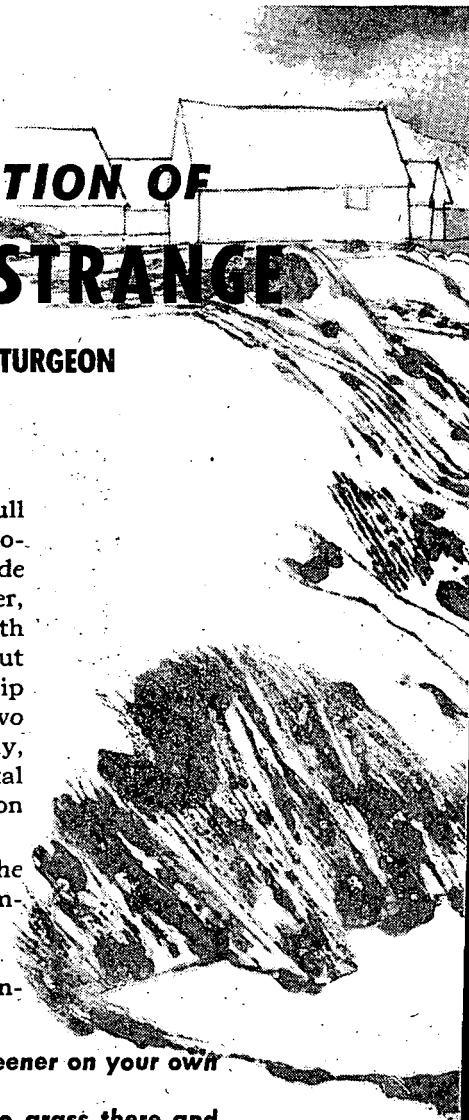
THE EDUCATION OF DRUSILLA STRANGE

By THEODORE STURGEON

Illustrated by ASHMAN



THE prison ship, under full shields, slipped down toward the cove, and made no shadow on the moonlit water, and no splash as it slid beneath the surface. They put her out and she swam clear, and the ship nosed up and silently fled. Two wavelets clapped hands softly, once, and that was the total mark the ship made on the prison wall.

For killing the Preceptor, she had been sentenced to life imprisonment.

With torture.

She swam toward the beach un-

The grass invariably is greener on your own planet—even if there is no grass there and would not be that color if there were any!

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til smooth fluid sand touched her knee. She stood up, flung her long hair back with a single swift motion, and waded up the steep shingle, one hand lightly touching the bulging shoulder of the rocks which held the cove in their arms.

Ahead she heard the slightest indrawn breath, then a cough. She stopped, tall in the moonlight. The man took a half-step forward, then turned his head sidewise and a little upward away from her, into the moon.

"I'm—I beg your—sorry," he floundered.

She sensed his turmoil, extracted its source, delved for alternative acts, and chose the one about which he showed the most curious conflict. She crouched back into the shadows by the rock.

I didn't see you there.

"I didn't see you until you . . . I'm sorry. Why am I standing here like this when you . . . I'll move on down the . . . I'm sorry."

SHE took and fanned out his impressions, sorted them, chose one. *My clothes—*

He started away from the rocks, looking about him, as if he might have been leaning against something hot, or something holy. "Where are they? Am I in the way? Shall I put them near the . . . I'll just move on down."

No . . . no clothes. Directly from him she took *Where are they?*

"I don't see any. Somebody must've—are you sure you put them—*where* did you put them?" He was floundering again.

She caught and used the phrase *Why, who would . . . what a lowdown trick!*

"Is your—do you have a car up there?" he asked, peering up at the grassy rim of the beach. He added immediately, "But even if you got to the car . . ."

I have no car.

"My God!" he said indignantly. "Anybody that would . . . here, what am I standing here yapping for? You must be chilled to the bone."

He was wearing a battered trench coat. He whipped it off and approached her, three-quarters backward, the coat dangling from his blindly extended arm like a torn jib on a bowsprit. She took it, shook it out, turned it over curiously, then slipped into it so that it fell around her the way it had covered him.

Thank you.

She stepped out of the shadows, and the huge relief he felt, and the admixture of guilty regret that went with it made her smile.

"Well!" he said, rubbing his hands briskly. "That's better, now, isn't it?" He looked up the lonely beach, and down. "Live

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around here somewhere?"

No.

"Oh." He said it again, then, "Friends bring you down?" he asked diffidently.

She hesitated. *Yes.*

"Then they'll be back for you!"

She shook her head. He scratched his. Suddenly he stepped away from her and demanded, "Look, you don't think I had anything to do with stealing your clothes, do you?"

Oh, no!

"Well, all right, because I didn't, I mean I couldn't do a thing like that, even in fun. What I was going to say, I mean, now I don't want you to think anyth . . ." He ground to a stop, took a breath and tried again. "What I mean is, I have a little shack over the rise there. You'd be perfectly safe. I have no phone, but there's one a mile down the beach. I could go and call your friends. I mean I'm not one of those . . . well, look, you do just what you think is best."

She searched. She felt it emerged correctly: *I really mustn't put you to that trouble. But you're very kind.*

"I'm not kind. You'd do exactly the same thing for me, now wouldn't . . ."

He stopped because she was laughing silently, her eyes turned deep into the corners to look at him. She laughed because she had sensed his startled laughter at what he was saying even before it had uncurled.

"I—can't say you would at that," he faltered, and then his laughter surfaced. By the time it had run its course, she was striding lithely beside him.

THEY walked for a while in silence, until he said, "I do the same thing myself, go swimming in the—I mean without . . . at night. But generally not this late in the year."

She found this unremarkable and made no reply.

"Uh," he began, and then faltered and fell silent again.

She wondered why he felt it so necessary to talk. She probed, and discovered that it was because he was excited and frightened and guilty and happy all at once, full of little half-finished plans concerning cold odds and ends of food and the contents of a clothes closet, the breathless flash of a mental picture of her emerging from the water with certain details oddly highlighted, the quick blanking of the picture and the stern frown that did it, the timid hope that she did not suspect feelings that he could not control . . . Oh, yes, he must talk.

"You have a—do you mind if I say something personal?"

She looked up attentively.

"You have a funny sort of way

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of talking. I mean—" he leaned close—"you hardly move your lips when you talk."

She turned her head slightly and flexed her lips. She made the effort and said aloud, "Oh?"

"Maybe it's the moonlight," he informed himself. Inwardly he pictured her still face and said *Strange, strange, strange.* "What's your name?"

"Dru. Drusilla," she said carefully. It was not her name, but she had probed and discovered that he liked it. "Drusilla Strange."

"Beautiful," he breathed. "Say, that's a beautiful name, did you know that? Drusilla Strange. That's just . . . just exactly *right.*" He looked about at the cool white blaze of the beach, at the black grass under the moon. "Oh!" he said abruptly, "I'm Chan. Chandler Behringer. It's a clumsy sort of name, hard to say, not like—"

"Chandler Behringer," she said. "It sounds like a little wind catching its tail around a—" she dipped into him swiftly—"palm frond."

"Huh!" he shouted. It was one syllable of a laugh, and it was sheer delight. Then he found the rest of the laugh.

He put his hand on her arm just above the elbow and steered her off the beach. The feel of her flesh under the flat close fabric caused a shock that ran up his arm and straight through his defenses.

"Here's my place," he said, with all the wind and none of the cordal vibration necessary to make a voice. He moved away from her and marched up the slope, frowning, leading the way. He ducked into a lean-to porch and fumbled too busily with a latch. "You'd better wait for a moment while I light the lamp. It's sort of cluttered."

She waited. The doorway swallowed him, and there was a fumbling, and a scratching, and suddenly the cabin had an interior. She moved inside.

"You needn't be afraid to look around," he said presently, watching her.

SHE did, immediately. She had been looking straight at him, following his critical inventory of the entire place, and she now knew it every bit as well as he. But, "Oh," she said, "this is—" she hesitated—"cosy."

"A small place," he said, "but it's dismal." He laughed, and explained apologetically, "I got that line from a movie."

She sorted out the remark, wondered detachedly why he had made it, half-heartedly probed for the reason, then dropped it as unessential effort.

"A nice soft blanket," he said, lifting it. Her hands went reflex-

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ively to the top button of the trench coat and fell away at his next words. "When I go out, you just wrap yourself up nice and snug. I won't be long. Now give me the number."

His mental code for "number" was so brief and so puzzling—a disk with holes in it superimposed on ruled paper—that she was quite at a loss. "Number?"

"Your friends. I'll phone them. They can bring you some clothes, take you home." He laughed self-consciously. "I'll try to say it so that . . . I mean, make it sound . . . Do you know, I haven't the first idea of just what I'll tell them?"

"Oh," she said. "My friends . . . have no phone."

"No—oh. What, no phone?" He looked at her, around at the walls, and inevitably at the bed. It was a very small bed. He gestured weakly at the door. "A . . . telegram, maybe, but that would take a long time, and . . . Oh, I know. I have clothes, dungarees and things. A lumberjack shirt. Why didn't I think of it? Girls wear all that kind of—but shoes, I don't know . . . And then I'll get you a taxi!" he finished triumphantly, and the chaos within him was, to misuse the term, deafening.

She considered very, very carefully and then said, "No taxi could take me back. It's much too far for a taxi to travel."

"Isn't there anyone that—"

"There isn't anyone," she said firmly.

After a long, complicated pause, he asked gently, "What happened?"

She averted her face.

"It was something sad," he half-whispered, and although he was quite still, she could feel the tendrils of his sympathy reaching out toward her. "That's all right, don't worry. Don't," he said loudly, as if it were the first word of a very important pronouncement; but it would not form. He said at last, inanely, "I'll make coffee."

He crossed the room, raising his hand to pat her shoulder as he passed, checking it, not touching her at all, while the echo of that first shock bounded and rebounded within him. He bent over the stove, and in a moment the evil smell of the lamp, which had been pressing closer and closer upon her consciousness, was eclipsed completely by what was to her a completely overpowering, classic, catastrophic and symphonic stench. Her eyelids flickered and closed as she made a tremendous nervous effort and at last succeeded in the necessary realignment of her carbon-oxygen dynamic. And in a moment she could ignore the fumes and open her eyes again.

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Chan was looking at her.

"You'll have to stay."

"Yes," she said. She looked at his eyes. "You don't want me to."

"I want you to," he said hurriedly, "I want . . ." He thought *She's in trouble and she's afraid I'm going to take advantage of it.*

"I'm in trouble," she said, "but I'm not afraid you'll take advantage of it."

HE flashed a startling white grin. *She trusts me.* Then the grin faded and the internal frown clamped down. But it could not hide the thought: *She's . . . she expects . . . she's maybe the kind who . . .*

"I'm not the kind," she said levelly, "who—"

"Oh, I know I know I know!" he interrupted rapidly, and with it he thought *Why is she so damned sure of herself?*

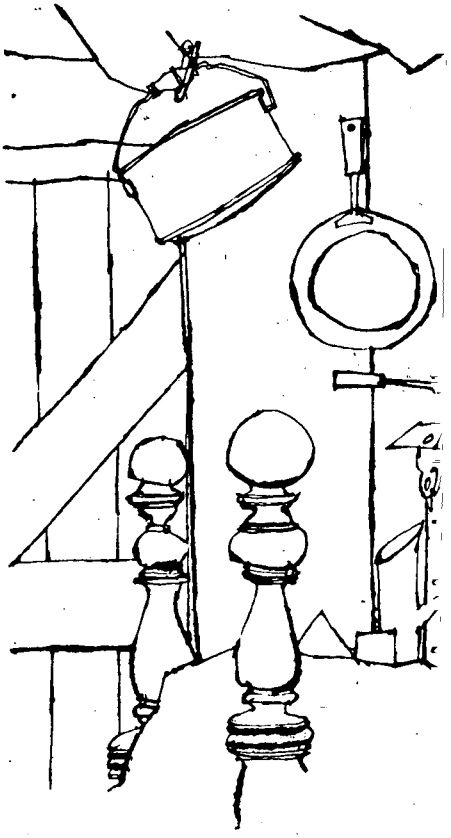
"I just don't know *what* to do!" she said.

He smiled again. "You just leave everything to me. We'll make out fine, I mean you're quite safe, you know. And in the morning everything will look a lot brighter. Oh, that coat, that wet old coat. Here," he bustled, "here—here."

From curtained clothes-pole and paper-lined orange crate came blue denims, a spectral holocaust in woolen plaid, a pair of socks of a red that did not belong within four miles of any color in the shirt. She looked at the clothes and at him. He turned his back.

"I'll go on with the . . . cook-cook-coffee and you know," he said nervously.

She took off the trench coat



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and while her fingers solved the logical problem called buttons and the topological one whereby a foot enters a sock, she pondered Chandler Behringer's extraordinary sensitivities. Either this species must overpopulate its planet in nine generations, she thought whimsically, or it must die from nervous exhaustion in four. The dungarees gouged and rasped her skin until she damped its sensitivity, but the feel of the heavy, washed wool of the shirt was delightful.

He set out plates and in a

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moment slid a handsome orange-and-white edible onto them. She looked at it with interest, and then her eyes traveled to the small table by the stove, and she saw the shells. *By the Fountain Itself,* she said silently, *eggs! They eat EGGS!*

She forced her feelings into a desensitized compartment of her mind and corked it. Then she sat opposite Chandler and ate heartily. The coffee was bitter and, to her palate, gritty, but she drank her second cup with composure. *He's so very pleased that I eat with him,* she thought. *They probably do everything gregariously, even where cooperation is not involved.* She was conscious of no disgust, for that, too, was insulated—and so it must stay for the rest of her imprisonment, which is to say the rest of her life.

The food seemed to have relaxed him; a sphygmomanetic allocation, she deduced. And involuntary. How very confining. His chatter had eased and he was taking a silent pleasure in watching her. When she met his eyes finally, he leaped up nervously and scraped and washed the plates energetically. He thought, *I wonder if she liked it.* And: *She knows how to be a guest, and how to keep herself from plunging into the dish-washing, putting them back in the wrong place and all.* And: *I like doing things for her. I wish I could do everything for . . .* And then the frown.

Suddenly in a rush of embarrassment and self-accusation, he spun around and said, "I haven't even asked you, I mean told you, if you, I mean, well, this is just a shack and we haven't all the fixtures."

She looked at him blankly, then probed.

Oh. This is loaded, too. But not eating. Amazing.

She made it as easy for him as she could. She rose and gave him the quick nervous smile that was correct.

"It's outside," he said. "To your left. That little path."

She slipped outside, stalked directly down to the water's edge and with as little effort and even less distress than a polite cough might have cost her, she vomited up the eggs and the coffee. She had eaten, after all, only two days ago.

HE had the bed made up when she came in, the pillow smooth, crisp sheets flat and diagonally folded at the head end.

"I bet you're as tired as I am," he said. "And that's a whole lot."

"Oh," she said, looking at the bed. For sleeping! What would she want sleep for? Because of a

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phylic habit unbroken in these savages since they were forced to spend the dark hours immobile in a rocky hole to save themselves from nocturnal carnivores? But she said, "Oh, how neat. But I can't take your bed. I'll sit up."

"You'll do no such thing," he said severely, and her eyes widened. He busied himself with a blanket roll and sleeping bag, which he put on the floor just as far—four feet or so—as it could possibly go from the bed. "I love this old bag. Look, nylon and down—the only expensive thing I own. Except my guitar."

She visualized "guitar" and immediately put it down as something to investigate. The flash she got in his coding was brief, but sufficient for her to recognize its size, shape and purpose, and to conclude that although its resonant volumes were gross and its vents inaccurately placed, it was closer to the engineering she knew and understood than most things she had glimpsed here so far.

"You didn't tell me you played the guitar," she said politely.

"I get paid for it," he said, yawning, and she knew that this yawn belonged to this remark and not to the circumstance of somnolence. "Ready for bed?"

Patiently she bowed to his formalities. "You're very kind."

He went to the lamp and turned it out. The low moon streamed in.

HE hesitated, slid into his sleeping bag after removing only his shoes. There ensued a considerable amount of floundering, ducking, and thumping on the floor, and at last he brought his trousers out, folded as small as possible. He wadded them between the corner of the sleeping bag and the wall as if they were a secret. Then he sat up and took off his shirt. He hung it on the corner of the window sill, lay down, zipped the bag up to his neck, and ostentatiously turned on his side with his face to the wall. "Good night."

"Good night," she said. Resignedly she got between the sheets, as indicated by the folded-down corner, pulled up the blanket, porpoised out of her trousers, folded them, brought them out and hid them; removed her shirt, reached out a long arm and hung it on the other corner of the window sill. Did he still have his socks on? He did. She wriggled her toes and slightly desensitized her ankles where the weave pressed them.

"You're perfectly safe. Don't worry about a thing."

"Thank you, Chan. I feel safe. I'm not worried. Good night."

"Good night. *Dru*," he said

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suddenly, lifting himself on one elbow.

"What is it?"

He lay down again. "Good night."

She watched with deep interest the downward spiralings of his thoughts into the uprising tides of sleep. It happened to him suddenly, and the "noise" factor of his conscious presence slumped away out of the room.

And the torture began.

SHE had known it was there, but Chandler Behringer was a fine foil for it. He alleviated nothing, but he set up a constant distraction purely by the bumbling, burrowing busyness of his mind. Now it had faded to a whisper, to an effective nothing, and her torture poured down on her. From the warp-shielded, indetectible satellites which guarded the prison planet and administered the punishment, agony poured down to her.

Thus it will be tonight, and the next and next nights, and every night for all of my own forever. Hushed in the day and hungry and sweet at night, it will rain down on me. And I can lie and relax, and I can harbor my anger and anchor my anguish, but the tide will rise, the currents will tug until they break me, if it takes two hundred years. And when I'm broken by it, the

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torture will go on and on—and on.

Most of the torture was music. Some of the torture was singing.

And a little of the torture was a thing hardly describable in Earthly terms, which made pictures—not on a screen, not on the mind like memories, however poignant—but pictures so clear and true that the sudden whip of a pennant brought, a second later, spent wind to buffet the eyelids, pictures wherein one walked barefoot on turf and knew a mottling of heat and coolth in the arches, with the moisture of the grass its broken green bleeding. These were pictures where to loose a sling was to know the draw of the pectorals and the particled bite of soil under the downdriven toenails, and to picture a leap was to kick away a very planet, to have that priceless quarter-second of absolute float, and to come back to a cushioning of one's own litheness.

This was music of an ancient planet peopled by a race far older. This was music with the softness and substance of weathered granite, and the unwinding intricacies of a fern. It was ferocious music with a thick-wristed control of its furies so sure that it could be used for laughter. And altogether it was music that rose and cycled and bubbled and built like the Fountain Itself.

This was the high singing of birds beauty-lost in altitude, and the heavier, upward voices expressed by the reaching of trees. It was the voice of the tendon burst for being less strong than the will, and the heart of the sea, and its base was the bass of pulsations of growth (for even a shouldering tree trunk has a note, if listened to for years enough) and altogether these were the voices that made and were made by the Fountain Itself.

And these were the pictures of the Fountain Itself . . .

And such were the tortures of those who were exiled, imprisoned and damned.

She lay there and hated the moonlight; the moon she regarded as ugly and vulgar and new. It seemed to her an added lash, as were all things similar and all things contrasting to the world she had lost. She turned eyes grown cold on the sleeping man, and curled her lip; the creature was a clever counterpart, a subtle caricature, of the worst of the men of her race, in no way perfect, in no way magnificent, but in no way so crude an artifact as to permit her to forget what was surely its original.

By comparison and by contrast, Earth, this muddy, uncouth ball of offal, pinioned her soul to her home. Earth had everything that could be found on her world—after a fashion—racecourses com-

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paratively an ármspan wide, racing dun rats ridden by newts in sleazy silks . . . men whose eyes sparkled in the sun not quite as much as her racial brother's might when he, with only his shaded hand to help him, sought and found a ghostly nebula.

CELL by interlocking cell, ion by osmotic particle, she belonged elsewhere. And Earth, which was her world falsified; and the endless music, which was her world in truth—these would never let her forget it.

So she cursed the moonbeams and the music sliding down them, and swore that she would not be broken. She could soak herself in this petty planet, zip it up to her neck to conceal anything of her real self in her pettiest acts; she could don the bearing and the thoughts themselves of Earth's too-fine, too-empty puppets—and still inwardly she would be herself, a citizen of her world, part of the Fountain Itself. As long as she was that, in any fiber, she could not be completely an exile. Excommunicated she might be; bodily removed, wingless and crawling, trembling under the dear constant breath of her home; but until she broke, her jailers had failed for all their might and righteousness.

The sun rose and turned her away from her bitterness, a little. Chan's sleeping consciousness came close and roared around her, fell back into blacknesses. She rose and went to the door. The sea was rose-gold and breathing and the sun was aloft, a shade too near, too yellow, and too small. She damned it heartily with a swift thought that spouted and spread and hung in the air like the mist from a fountain, and went and dressed.

She glanced at the percolator, understood it, and deftly made coffee. At its first whisper in the tube, Chan sighed and his consciousness came upward with a rush. Drusilla slipped outside. Patience she had in full measure, but she felt it unworthy to tap it for such unwieldy formalities as she knew she must witness if she stayed in the room during the cracking of his nylon chrysalis.

There was a hoarse shout from inside, a violent floundering, and then Chandler Behringer appeared. He was tousled and frightened. His panic, she noted, had been sufficient to drive him outdoors without his shirt, but not without his trousers. He squeezed his eyelids so tight shut that his cheekbones seemed to rise; then opened them and saw her standing by the beach margin. The radiance that came from his face competed for a moment with the early tilting sunlight.

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"I thought you'd gone."

She smiled. "No."

She came to him. His eyes devoured her. He raised both hands together and placed them, one on the other, on his left collarbone. She understood that he was concealing the vestigial nipples (which were absent in males of her race) with his wrists. She examined this reflex with some curiosity, and filed away for future puzzlement the fact that he did this because he wore trousers; had they been bathing trunks, the reflex would not have appeared. He took a breath so deep that she empathized his pain.

"You are the most beautiful woman I have ever seen," he said.

She did not doubt it, and had no comment.

"The most beautiful woman who ever lived," he murmured.

Abruptly she turned her back, and now it was her eyes which squeezed shut. "I am *not*!" she said in a tone so saturated with hatred and violence that he stepped back almost into the doorway.

Without another word she strode off, down the beach, her direction chosen solely by the way she happened to be facing at the time. In a moment she was conscious of his feet padding after her.

"Dru, Dru, don't go!" he panted. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean, *hah!* to do anything that *hah!* oh, I was only—"

She stopped and turned so abruptly that had he taken two more steps they would have collided. Far from taking steps, however, he had all he could do to stay upright.

SHE stood looking at him, unmoving. On her face was no particular expression; but there was that in the high-held head, the slightly distended nostrils, the splendid balance of her stance, and her gracefully held, powerful hands that made approach impossible. His eyes were quite round and his lips slightly parted. He extended one hand and moved his mouth silently, then let the hand fall. His knees began to tremble visibly.

She turned again and walked away. He stood there for a long time watching her go. When she was simply a brilliant fleck on the brightening dunes, the purposeless hand came forward again.

"Dru?" he said, in a voice softened to soprano inaudibility by all the cautions of awe. And she was gone, and he turned slowly, as if he had a tall and heavy weight on his rounded shoulders, and plodded back to the cabin.

She found a road which paralleled the beach and climbed to it. Fools cluster about the Universe, she thought, like bubbles about

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the fountain pool, shifting and pulsing at random, without design, purpose or function. She had left such a fool and she was such a fool. There was far more culpability in her folly than in that of the man. He had little control over what he might say, and less understanding, because of his nature and his limitations. Neither his faculties nor his conditioning could enable him to understand why she felt such fury.

She stabbed her heels into the sandy roadbed as she walked. She ground her teeth. *The most beautiful woman who ever lived . . .*

Her beauty!

Where, exile—where, criminal, has your beauty brought you?

She strode on, her mood so black it all but eclipsed the torture music.

Perhaps fifteen minutes later, she became conscious of a shrill ultrasonic, a rapidly pulsing, urgent, growing thing that would be a silence to all but her. She slowed, stopped finally. The sound came from behind her, but she would not confuse her analysis by looking back. She listened as an intervening wind carried the vibrations away and then let them come back again, nearer, stronger. She sensitized her bare feet; she raised an arm and took the vibrations on the back of her hand. She became conscious of synchronous sounds.

Something rotated at approximately thirty-eight hundred and forty rpm. Something was chain-driven and the chain was not a metal. Something pounded . . . no, paced—something rolled endless soft cleats on the earth. She heard the straining of coil springs, the labored slide of heavy transverse leaf-springs, the make-and-break in the meniscus of the oil guarding busy pistons.

The utter stupidity of so complex a thing as an automobile was, to her, more wondrous than a rainbow.

At last she turned to look, and in a moment she saw it climb a rise some two miles away. The piercing ultrasonic was beyond bearing, and she adjusted her hearing to eliminate everything between eighty-six and eighty-eight thousand cycles.

MORE comfortable now, she waited patiently. The car slid down a straight and gentle grade toward her, spitting sunlight through its chromium teeth, palming aside the morning air and pressing it back and down its sleek flanks, while underneath, where there was no hint of fairing, air shocked and roiled and shuddered and troubled what dust it could find in the sandy road. It was a very large and very new car. Drusilla watched it, wide-eyed. She came to wonder what

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conclusions one would have regarding these—these savages, if one knew nothing of them but such a vehicle. What manner of man streamlines only where he can see?

The lovely thought, then: *It's a world of clowns.*

She smiled; the driver saw it and his foot came down on the brake pedal. The car threw down its glittering baroque nose, slid a hand's breadth, and lowered itself sitzwise into its warm bath of springs.

The driver's eyes were long and flat and his nose and chin were sharp. Drusilla watched what he was doing, which was watching himself watch her.

Suddenly he said, "How far is it to—" and before the first word was spoken, she knew he was completely familiar with these roads.

She said, "Your—" and raised her hand to point accurately at the hood, while she searched him for the term. "Your rocker-arm's not getting oil. The third one from the front." Even while the motor idled, the soundless shriek of that dry friction would have been unbearable had she let it.

"Sounds all right to me," he shrugged. He looked—he journeyed, rather—down from her eyes, down until he saw that her feet were bare. He left his gaze where it was and said, "Let me give you a lift." He half turned then, reached one thin spidery arm back and across without looking, and the rear door swung open.

Drusilla took one step forward and only then saw that the man was not alone in the car. She stopped, amazed—not at the woman who sat there, but at the fact that perceptions such as hers had missed so much. She glanced at the man, and realized that it was his feeling, or lack of it, that had numbed and blinded her to everything about the woman who sat beside him. She was companion reduced to presence, minified to fixture, reduced to a very limbo of familiarity. Drusilla stared at her, and the woman stared back.

She was a small woman, compact, so coiffed and clad that she was only a blandness. What kept her from being featureless as an egg was a pair of achingly blue eyes large enough for a being half again her size, and a perfect mouth painted such a transcendental, pupil-shrinking red that surely it would melt fuse-wire. Her wide eyes were blank.

To Drusilla's horror, a growth like an iridescent liver sprang into being between the flaming lips, grew to the size of a fist and collapsed limply. The lips parted, a pink tongue deftly caught,

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cleared, and drew the limp matter back between an even flicker of paper-white teeth. And again the face was molded and smooth and motionless.

"My wife," said the man, "so you're chaperoned. My God, Lu, you got bubble gum again." The woman took her gaze away from Drusilla and placed it on the driver, but there was otherwise no change. "Get in."

DRUSILLA'S mind played back a fleeting inner sensation she had taken from him when he had said "My wife." It was . . . pride? No. Admiration? Hardly! *Compliment;* that was it. This woman was a compliment he paid himself. He had no tiny fleck of doubt that he was admired for her careful finish.

The big blue eyes swung to her again and she probed.

For a ghastly micro-second, she had all the sensations of walking into a snakepit with chloroform on her scarf. She recoiled violently, moved far back to the low bank; and she shuddered.

"Come on, uh, hey, what's the matter?" the driver called.

Drusilla shook her head twice, not so much in refusal as in an attempt to escape from something that was laying clammy strands of silk on her face and hair. Without another word, she turned and walked away down the road, behind the car.

"Hey!"

Drusilla did not look back.

He started the car and drove off slowly. In a moment, the woman leaned forward and tugged hard on the wheel. The car heeled back on the road, and at last he took his eyes from the rear view mirror.

"Now what's with her?" he demanded of the windshield wiper.

Lu blew another bubble.

When the car was gone, Drusilla went slowly back and past the place she had met it, and on toward the town. From her marrow she swore a mighty oath that never again would she be trapped into sending her probes into such a revolting mess. The driver hadn't been like that; Chan Behringer hadn't. Yet she knew with a terrible certainty that there must be thousands like that creature here on the prison planet.

So as she walked she devised something, a hair-triggered synaptic structure, a reaction pattern that could, even without her conscious knowledge, detect the faintest beginnings of a presence such as this; and it would snap down her shields, isolate her, protect her, keep her clean.

She was badly shaken. The presence of that woman had shaken her, but the most devastating thing of all was the

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knowledge that she could be shaken. It was a realization most difficult for her to absorb; it had little precedent in her cosmos.

Walking, she shuddered again.

DRUSILLA came to the town and wandered until she found a restaurant which needed a waitress. She borrowed the price of a pair of beach sandals from the weary cashier and went to work. She found a little room and at the end of the second day she had the price of a cotton dress.

In the second week she was a stenographer and, in the second month, secretary to the head of a firm which made boat-sails and awnings. She invested quietly, sold some poems, a song, two articles and a short story. In terms of her environment, she did very well indeed, very fast. In her own estimate, she did nothing but force her attention randomly away from her torture.

For the torture, of course, continued. She bore it with outward composure, shucked it off as casually as, from time to time, she changed her name, her job, her hair-styling and her accent. But like the lessons she learned, like the knowledge of the people she met and worked with, the torture accumulated. She could estimate her capacity for it. It was large, but not infinite. She could get rid of none of it, any more than she could get rid of knowledge. It could be compacted and stored. As long as she could do this with the torture, she was undefeated. But she was quite capable of calculating intake against capacity and she had not much time. A year and a half, two . . .

She would stand at the window, absorbing her punishment, staring up into the night sky with her bright wise eyes. She could not see the guardian ships, of course, but she knew they were there. She knew of their killer-boats which could, if necessary, slip down in moments and blast a potential escapee, or one about to violate the few simple rules of a prisoner's conduct.

Sometimes, objectively, she marveled at the cruel skill of the torture. Music alone, with its ineffable spectrum of sadness and longing and wild nostalgic joy, could have been enough and more than enough for a prisoner to bear; but the sensory pictures, the stimulative and restimulative flow and change of taste and motion and all the subtleties of the kinetic senses — these, mixed and mingled with music, charging in where music lulled, marching in the footprints of the music's rhythmic stride — these were the things which laughed at her barriers, sparred with her, giggling; met her fists with a breeze, her

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rapier with a gas, her advances with a disappearance.

There was no fighting attacks like these. Ignorance would have been a defense, but was of no use to her who was so nerve-alive to all the torture's sense and symbolism. All she could do was to absorb, compact, and hope that she could find a defense before she broke.

SO she lived and outwardly prospered. She met some humans who amused her briefly, and others she avoided after one or two meetings because they reminded her so painfully of her own people — a smile, a stride, a matching of colors. If she met any others with the terrifying quality of the woman in the car, she was not aware of it; that part of her defense, at least, was secure.

But the torture still poured down upon her, and after half a year she knew she must take some steps to counteract it. At base, the solution was simple. If she did nothing, the torture would crush her, and there was no surcease in that, for having broken, she would go on suffering it. She could kill herself, but that in itself would fulfill the terms of her sentence — "life imprisonment — with torture." There was only one way — to be killed; and to be killed by the guardians. She was not under a death sentence. If she forced one, they would have to violate their own penalty, and she would be able to die unbroken, as befits a Citizen of the Fountain Itself.

More and more she studied the sky, knowing of the undetectible presence of the guardians and their killer-boats, knowing that if she could think of it, there must be a way to bring one of them careening silently down on her to snuff her out. She made sendings of many kinds — even of the kind she had used to extinguish the life-force of the Preceptor — without altering the quality or degree of torture in the slightest.

Perhaps the guardians sent, but did not receive; perhaps nothing could touch them. Geared to the pattern of a Citizen's mind and conditioning, they patiently produced that which must, in time, destroy it. The destruction would be because of the weakness of the attacked. Drusilla wanted to be destroyed through the strength of the attacker. The distinction was, to her, clear and vital.

There had to be a way, if only she could think of it.

There was, and she did.

HE came onstage grinning like a boy, swinging his guitar carelessly. The set was a living room. He plumped down on a one-armed easychair and hooked

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a brown-and-white hassock toward him with his heel. There was applause.

"Thank you, Mother," said Chan Behringer. He slipped the plectrum from under the first and second strings. Dru thought *Your low D is one one-hundred-twenty-eighth tone sharp.*

Deftly, out of sight of the audience, he plugged in the pickup cable. Dru watched attentively. She had never seen a twelve-string guitar before.

He began to play. He played competently, with neither mistakes nor imagination. There was a five-stage amplifier built into his chair and a foot-pedal tone control and electronic vibrato in the hassock. A rough cutoff at twenty-seven thousand cycles, she realized, and then remembered that, to most humans, response flat to eight thousand is high fidelity.

She was immensely pleased with the electrical pickups; she had not noticed them at first, which was a compliment to him. One was magnetic, sunk into the fingerboard at the fourteenth fret. The other was a contact microphone, obviously inside the box, directly under the bridge. The either-or-both switch was audible when he moved it, which she thought disgraceful.

He finished his number, drawled a few lines of patter, asked for

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and played a couple of requests and an encore, by which time Drusilla had left the theater and was talking to the stage doorman. He took the paper parcel she handed him and sent it to the dressing rooms via the callboy.

In a matter of seconds, there was a wild whoop from backstage and Chan Behringer came bounding down the iron steps, clutching a wild flannel shirt, a pair of blue dungarees, and some tatters of paper and string.

"Dru! Dru!" he gasped. He ran to her, his arms out. Then he stopped, faltered, put his head very slightly to one side. "Dru," he said again, softly.

"Hello, Chan."

"I never thought I'd see you again."

"I had to return your things."

"Too good to be true," he murmured. "I — we —" Suddenly he turned to the goggling doorman and tossed the clothes to him. "Hang on to these for me, will you, George?" To Drusilla he said, "I should take 'em backstage, but I'm afraid to let you out of my sight."

"I won't run away again."

"Let's get out of here," he said. He took her arm, and again there was the old echo of a shock he had once felt at the touch of her flesh through fabric.

They went to a place, all soft lights and leather, and they talked about the beach and the city and show business and guitar music, but not about her strange fury with him the morning she had stalked out of his life.

"You've changed," he said at length.

"Have I?"

"You were like — like a queen before. Now you're like a princess."

"That's sweet."

"More . . . human."

She laughed. "I wasn't exactly human when you first met me. I'd had a bad time. I'm all right now, Chan. I — didn't want to see you until I was all right."

They talked until it was time for his next act, and after that they had dinner.

She saw him the next day, and the next.

THE chubby man with a face like a cobbler and hands like a surgeon made the most beautiful guitars in the world. He sprang to his feet when the tall girl came in. It was the first time he had paid such a courtesy in fourteen years.

"Can you cut an F-slot that looks like this?" she demanded.

He looked at the drawing she laid on the counter, grunted, then said, "Sure, lady. But why?"

She launched into a discussion which, at first, he did not hear, for it was in his field and in his

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language and he was too astonished to think. But once into it, he very rapidly learned things about resonance, harmonic reinforcement, woods, varnishes and reverse-cantilever designs that were in no book he had ever heard about.

When she left a few minutes later, he hung gasping to the counter. In front of him was a check for work ordered. In his hand was a twenty-dollar bill for silence. In his mind was a flame and a great wonderment.

She spilled a bottle of nail-polish remover on Chan's guitar. He was kind and she was pathetically contrite. It was all right, he said; he knew a place that could retouch it before evening. They went there together. The little man with the cobbler's face handed over the new instrument, a guitar with startling slots, an ultra-precision bridge, a fingerboard that crept into his hand as if it were alive and loved him. He chorded it once, and at the tone he put it reverently down and stared. His eyes were wet.

"It's yours," Drusilla twinkled. "Look—your name inlaid on the neck-back."

"I know your guitars," said Chan to the chubby man, "but I never heard of anything like this."

"Tricks to every trade," said the man, and winked.

Drusilla slipped him another twenty as they left.

THE electronics engineer stared at the schematic diagram. "It won't work."

"Yes, it will," said Drusilla. "Can you build it?"

"Well, gosh, yes, but who ever heard of voltage control like this? Where's the juice supposed to go from . . ." He leaned closer. "Well, I'll be damned. Who designed this?"

"Build it," she said.

He did. It worked. Drusilla wired it into the prop armchair and Chan never knew anything had been changed. He attributed everything to the new instrument as he became more familiar with it and began to exploit its possibilities. Suddenly there were no more layoffs. No more road trips, either. The clubs began to take important notice of the shy young man with the tear-your-heart-out guitar.

She stole his vitamin pills and replaced them with something else. She invited him to dinner at her apartment and he fainted in the middle of the fish course.

He came to seven hours later on the couch, long after the strange induction baker and the rack of impulse hypodermics had been hidden away. He remembered absolutely nothing. He was lying on his left arm and it ached.

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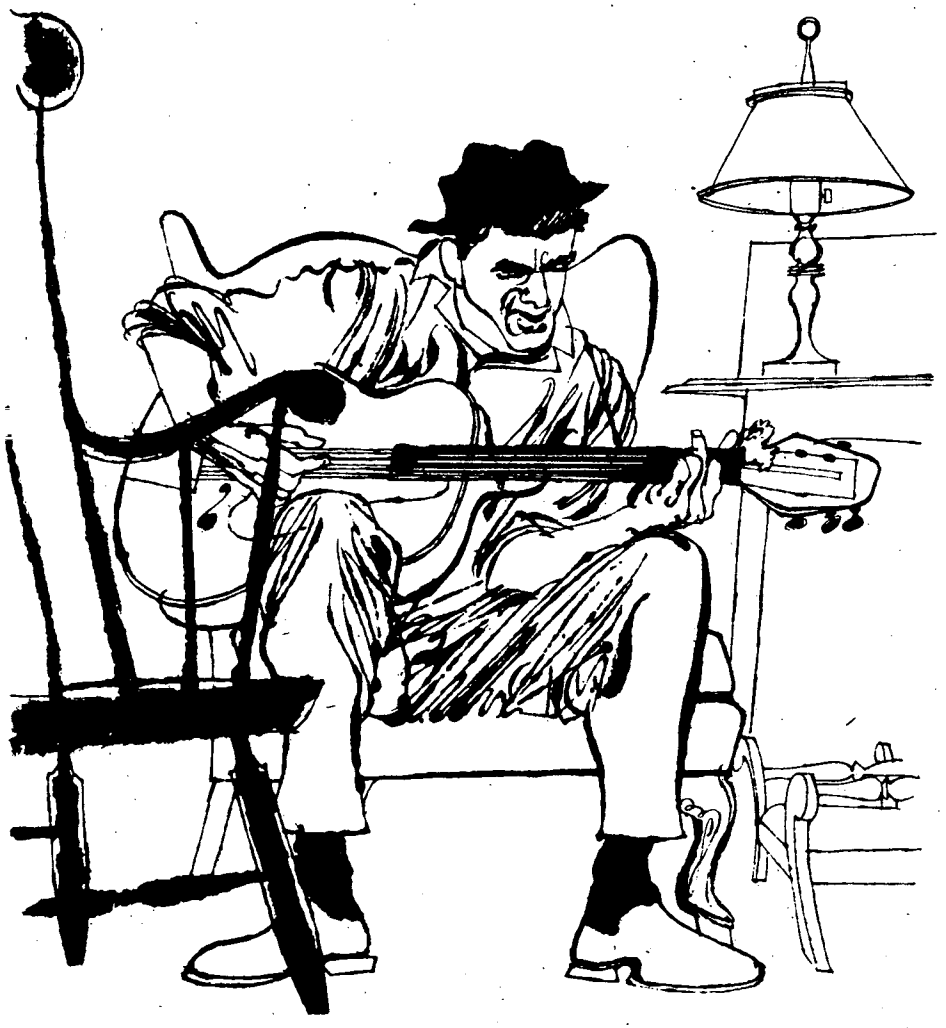

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Dru told him he had fallen asleep and she had just let him sleep it out.

"Poor dear, you've been working too hard."

He told her somewhat harshly that she must *never* let him sleep like that, cutting off the circulation in his fingering arm.

The next day, the arm was worse and he had to cancel a date. On the third day, it was back to normal, one hundred per cent, and on the fourth, fifth, and sixth days it continued to improve. And what it could do on the fingerboard was past description. Which was hardly surprising: there was not another arm on Earth like it, with its heavier nerve-fibers, the quadrupling of the relay-nodes on the medullary sheaths, the low-resistance, super-reactive axones, and the isotopic potassium and sodium which drenched them.

"I don't play this damn thing any more," he said. "I just think the stuff and that left hand reads my mind."

HE made three records in three months, and the income from them increased cubically each time. Then the record company decided to save money and put him under a long-term contract at a higher rate than anyone had ever been paid before.

Chan, without consulting Drusilla, bought one of a cluster of very exclusive houses just over the city line. The neighbors on the left were the Kerslers, whose grandfather had made their money in off-the-floor sanitary fixtures. The neighbors on the right were the Mullings—you know, Osprey Mullings, the writer, two books a year, year in and year out, three out of four of them making Hollywood.

Chan invited the Kerslers and the Mullings to his housewarming, and took Drusilla out there to surprise her.

She was surprised, all right. Kersler had a huge model railroad in his cellar and his mind likewise contained a great many precise minutiae, only one of which was permitted to operate at a time. Grace Kersler's mind was like an empty barn solidly lined with pink frosting. Osprey Mullings' head contained a set of baby's blocks of limited number, with which he constructed his novels by a ritualistic process of rearrangement. But Luellen Mullings was the bland-faced confection who secretly chewed bubble gum and who had so jolted Drusilla that day on the beach road.

It was a chatty and charming party, and it was the very first time that humans had been capable of irritating Drusilla so much that she had to absorb the an-

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noyance rather than ignore it. She bore this attack on her waning capacities with extreme graciousness, and at parting, the Kerslers and the Mullings pressed Chan's hand and wished him luck with that *beautiful* Drusilla Strange, you lucky fellow you.

And late at night, full to bursting with success and security and a fine salting of ambition, Chan drove her back to town and at her apartment, he proposed to her.

She held both his hands and cried a little, and promised to work with him and to help him even more in the future—but, "Please, please, Chan, never ask me that again."

He was hurt and baffled, but he kept his promise.

CHAN studied music seriously now—he never had before. He had to. He was giving concerts rather than performances, and he played every showcase piece ever composed by one virtuoso to madden and frustrate the others. He played all of the famous violin cadenzi on his guitar as well. He made arrangements of the arrangements. He did all this with the light contempt of a Rubinstein examining a two dollar lesson in chord-vamping. So at length he had no recourse but to compose. Some of his stuff was pretty advanced. All of it took you by the throat and held you.

One Sunday afternoon, "Try this," said Drusilla. She hummed a tone or two, then burst into a cascade of notes that brought Chan up standing.

"*God,* Dru!"

"Try it," she said.

He got his guitar. His left hand ran over the fingerboard like a perplexed little animal, and he struck a note or two.

"No," she said, "this." She sang.

"Oh," he whispered. Watching her, he played. When she seemed not pleased, he stopped.

"No," she said. "Chan, I can only sing one note at a time. You have twelve strings." She paused, thoughtfully, *listening.* "Chan, if I asked you to play that theme, and then to—to paint pictures on it with your guitar, would that make sense?"

"You usually make sense."

She smiled at him. "All right. Play that theme, and with it, play the way a tree grows. Play the way the bud leads the twig and the twig cuts up into space to make a hole for the branch. No," she said quickly, as his eyes brightened and his right thumb and forefinger tightened on the plectrum, "not yet. There's more."

He waited.

She closed her eyes. Almost inaudibly, she hummed something. Then she said, "At the same time,

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put in all the detail of a tree that has already grown." She opened her eyes and looked straight at him. "That will consolidate," she said factually, "because a tree is only the graphic trajectory of its buds."

He looked at her strangely. "You're quite a girl."

"Never mind that," she said quickly. "Now put those three things together with a fountain. And that's all."

"What kind of a fountain?"

She paled, but her voice was easy. "Silly. The only kind of fountain that could *be* with that theme, the tree growing, and the tree grown."

He struck a chord. "I'll try."

She hummed for him, then brought one long forefinger down. He picked up the theme from her voice. He closed his eyes. The guitar, of all instruments the most intimately expressive, given a magic sostenuto by its electronic graft, began to speak.

The theme, the tree growing, the tree grown.

Suddenly, the fountain, too.

What happened then left them both breathless. Music of this nature should never be heard in a cubic volume smaller than its subject.

When the pressured stridency of the music was quite gone, Chan looked at a cracked window pane and then turned to watch a talc-fine trickle of plaster dust stream down from the lintel of the french window.

"Where," he said, shaken, "did you get *that* little jangle?"

"Thin air, darling," said Drusilla blithely. "All the time, everywhere, whenever you like. Listen."

HE cocked his head. There was an intense silence. His left hand crept up to the frets and spattered over them. In spite of the fact that he had not touched the strings with his right hand, a structure of sound hung in the room, reinforcing itself, holding, holding . . . finally dying.

"That it?" he asked, awed.

She held up a thumb and forefinger very close together. "About so much of it."

"How come I never heard it before?"

"You weren't ready."

His eyes suddenly filled with tears. "Damn it, Drusilla . . . you're—you've done . . . Oh, hell, I don't know, I love you so much."

She touched his face. "Shh. Play for me, Chan."

He breathed hard, thickly. "Not in here."

He put down his guitar and went to get the portable amplifier. They set it upon the rolling lawn and plugged in the guitar. Chan held the instrument for a

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silent moment, sliding his hand over its polished flank. He looked up suddenly and met Drusilla's eyes. Chan's face twisted, for her ecstasy and gaiety and triumph added up to something very like despair, and he did not understand.

He would have thrown down the guitar then, for his heart was full of her, but she backed away, shaking her head lightly, and bent to the amplifier to switch it on. Her fingers pulled at the rotary switch as she turned it, and only she knew the nature of the mighty little transmitter that began to warm up along with the audio. She moved back still further; she did not want to be close to him when it—happened.

He watched her for a moment, then looked down at the guitar. He watched his four enchanted left fingers hook and hover over the fingerboard; he looked at them with a vast puzzlement that slowly turned to raptness. He began to sway gently.

Drusilla stood tall and taut, looking past him to the trees, to the scudding clouds and beyond. She dropped her shields and let the music pour in. And from the guitar came a note, another, two together, a strange chord. *For this I shall be killed,* she thought. To bring to the mighty scorn her people had of Earth and all things Earthly, this molded savage who could commune like a Citizen . . . this was the greatest affront.

A foam of music fell and feathered and rushed inward to the Fountainhead Itself, and every voice of it smashed and hurtled upward. The paired sixth strings of the guitar flung up with them in a bullroar *glissando* that broke and spread glistening all over the keyboard, falling and falling away from a brittle high spatter of doubled first strings struck just barely below the bridge, metallic and needly; and if those taut strings were tied to a listener's teeth, they could not be more intimate and shocking.

The unique sound box found itself in sudden shrill resonance, and it woke the dark strings, the deep and mighty ones. They thrummed and sang without being touched; and Chan's inhuman fingers found a figure in the middle register, folded it in on itself, broke it in two, and the broken pieces danced . . . and still the untouched strings hummed and droned, first one loud and then another as the resonances altered and responded.

And all at once the air was filled with the sharp and dusty smell of ozone.

WITH it all, the music, hers and Chan's, settled itself down and down like some dark

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giant, pressing and sweeping and gathering in its drapes and folds as it descended to rest, to collect its roaring and crooning and tittering belongings all together that they may be pieced and piled and understood; until at last the monster was settled and neat, leaving a looming bulk of silence and an undertone of pumping life and multi-level quiet stripes of contemplation. The whole structure breathed, slowly and more slowly, held its breath, let a tension develop, rising, painful, agonizing, intolerable . . .

"Play Red River Valley, hey, Chan?"

Drusilla gasped, and the ozone rasped her throat. Chan's fingers faltered, stopped. He half-turned, with a small, interrogative whimper.

Standing on the other side of the far hedge, near her house, was Luellen Mullings, her doll-figure foiled like a glass diamond in a negligible playsuit, her golden hair free, her perfect jaw busy on her sticky cud.

There was born in Drusilla a fury more feral, more concentrated, than any power of muscle or mind she had ever conceived of. Luellen Mullings, essence of all the degradation Earth was known for, all the cheapness, shallowness, ignorance and stupidity. She was the belch in the cathedral;

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she would befoul the Fountain Itself.

"Hi, Dru, honey. Didn't see you. Hey, I saw a feller at the Palace could play guitar holding it behind his back." She sniffed. "What's that funny smell? Like lightning or something."

"Get back in your house, you cheap little slut," Drusilla hissed.

"Hey, who you calling—" Luellen dipped down and picked up a smooth white stone twice the size of her fist. She raised it. Even Drusilla's advanced reflexes were not fast enough to anticipate what she did. The stone left her hand like a bullet. Drusilla braced herself—but the stone did not come to her. It struck Chan just behind the ear. He pivoted on his heel three-quarters of a revolution, and quietly collapsed on the grass, the guitar nestling down against him like a loving cat.

"Now look at what you made me do!" Luellen cried shrilly.

Drusilla uttered a harpy's scream and bounded across the lawn, her long hands spread out like talons. Luellen watched her come, round-eyed.

There is a force in steady eyes by which a tiger may be made to turn away. It can make a strong man turn and run. There is a way to gather this force into a deadly nubbin and hurl it like a grenade. Drusilla knew how to do this, for she had done it before; she had killed with it. But the force she hurled at Luellen Mullings now was ten times what she had dealt the Preceptor.

FOR a moment, the Universe went black, and then Drusilla became aware of a pressure on her face. There was another sensation, systemic, pervasive. Her legs, her arms, were weighted and tingly, and she seemed to have no torso at all.

She gradually understood the sensation on her face. Moist earth and grass. She was lying on her stomach on the lawn. She absorbed this knowledge as if it were a complicated matrix of ideas which, if comprehended, might lead to hitherto unheard-of information. At last she realized what was wrong with her body. Oxygen starvation. She began to breathe again, hard, painful gasps, inflations that threatened to burst the pulmonary capillaries, exhalations that brought her diaphragm upward until it crushed in panic against the pounding cardium.

She moved feebly, pulled a limp hand toward her, rested a moment with it flat on the grass near her shoulder. She began to press herself upward weakly, failed, rested a moment, and tried again. At last she raised herself to a sitting position.

Chan lay where he had fallen,

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still as death, guitar nearby.

Pop!

Drusilla looked up. Over the hedge, like an artificial flower, nodded Luellen's bright head. The quick deft tongue was retrieving the detritus of a broken bubble.

Drusilla snarled and formed another bolt, and as it left her something like a huge soft mallet seemed to descend on her shoulder-blades. Seated as she was, it folded her down until her chest struck the ground. Her hip joints crackled noisily. She writhed, straightened out, lay on her side gasping.

Pop!

Drusilla did not look up.

Presently she heard Luellen's light footsteps retreating down the gravel path. She gave herself over to a wave of weakness, and relaxed completely to let the strength flow back.

Shh . . . shh . . . approaching footsteps.

Drusilla rolled over and sat up again. Her head felt simultaneously pressured and fragile, as if any sudden move would make it burst like a faulty boiler. She turned pain-blinded eyes to the footsteps. When the jagged ache receded, she saw Luellen sauntering toward her on this side of the hedge, swinging her hips, humming tunelessly.

"Feeling better, honey?"

Drusilla glared at her. The killer-bolt began to form again. Luellen sank gracefully to the grass, near but not too near, and chose a grass-stem to pull up.

"I wouldn't if I were you, hon," she said pleasantly. "I can keep this up all day. You're just knocking yourself out."

She regarded the grass stem thoughtfully from her wide vacant eyes, poked out a membrane of gum, hesitated a moment, and drew it back in without blowing a bubble. The gum clicked wetly twice as she worked it.

"*Damn* you," said Drusilla devoutly.

LUELLEN giggled. Drusilla struggled upward, leaned heavily on one arm, and glared. Luellen said, without looking at her, "That's far enough, sweetie."

"Who are you?" Drusilla whispered.

"Home makuh," said Luellen, with a trace of Bronx accent. "Leisure class type home makuh."

"You know what I mean," Drusilla growled.

"Whyn't you look and see?"

Drusilla curled her lip.

"Don't want to get your pretty probes dirty, huh? Know what you are? You're a snob."

"A—a what?"

"Snob," said Luellen. She stretched prettily. "Just too good for *anybody*. Too good for him."

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She pointed to Chan with a gesture of her head. "Or me." She shrugged. "*Any*body."

Drusilla glanced at Chan and probed anxiously.

"He's all right," said Luellen. "Just unplugged."

Drusilla swung her attention back to the other girl. Reluctantly she dropped her automatic shield and reached out with her mind. *What are you?*

Luellen put her hands out, palms forward. "Not that way. I don't do that any more. Look if you want to, but if you want to talk to me, talk out loud."

Drusilla probed. "A criminal!" she said finally, in profound disgust.

"Sisters under the skin," said Luellen. She popped her gum. Drusilla shuddered. Luellen said, "Tell you what I did."

"I'm not interested."

"Tell you, anyway. Listen," Luellen said suddenly, "you know if you try to do anything to me, you'll go flat on your bustle. Well, the same thing applies if you don't listen to me. Hear?"

Drusilla dropped her eyes and was furiously silent. Reluctantly she realized that this creature could do exactly as she said.

"I'm not asking you to like it," Luellen said more gently. "Just listen, that's all."

She waited a moment, and when Drusilla offered nothing, she said, "What I did, I climbed over the wall at school."

Drusilla gasped. "You went outside?"

Luellen rolled over onto her stomach and propped herself on her elbows. She pulled another blade of grass and broke it. "Something funny happened to me. You know the feeling-picture about jumping?"

Drusilla recognized it instantly, the sweet, strong, breathless sensation of being strong and leaping from soft grass, floating, landing lithely.

"You do," said Luellen, glancing at Drusilla's face. "Well, I was having that picture one fine morning when it—*stuck*. I mean like one of the phonograph records here when it gets stuck. There I was feeling a jump. Just off the ground, and it all froze."

SHE laughed a little. "I was real scared. After a while, it started again. I went and asked my tutor about it. She got all upset and went to the Preceptor. He called me in and there was no end of hassel about it." Again she laughed. "I'd have forgotten the whole thing if he hadn't made such a fuss. He wanted me to forget it in the *worst* way. Tried to make me think it happened because there was something wrong with me.

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"So I got to thinking about it. When you do that, you start looking pretty carefully at *all* the pictures. And you know, they're full of scratches and flaws, if you look.

"But all the time they were teaching us that this was the world over the Wall — perfect green grass, beautiful men, the fountain and the falls and all the rest of it, that we were supposed to graduate to when the time came. I wondered so much that I wouldn't wait any more. So I went over the wall. They caught me and sent me here."

"I don't wonder," said Drusilla primly.

Luellen put pink fingers to her lips, hauled the gum out almost to arm's length, and chewed it back in as she talked. "And all you did was knock off the Preceptor!"

Drusilla winced and said nothing.

Luellen said, "You been here about two years, right? How many of us prisoners have you run into?"

"None!" said Drusilla, with something like indignation. "I wouldn't have anything to do with—" She clamped her lips tight and snorted through her nostrils. "Will you *stop* that giggling?"

"I can't help it," said Luellen. "It's part of the pattern for home makuhs. All home makuhs giggle."

". . . And that voice!"

"That's part of the pattern too, hon," said Luellen. "How do you think I'd go over at the canasta table if I weren't a-flutter and a-twitter, all coos and sighs and gentle breathings? My God, the girls'd be scared right out of their home permanents!" She tittered violently.

"Again!" Drusilla winced.

"You might as well get used to it, hon. I had to. You'll be doing something equally atrocious yourself, pretty soon. It goes under the head of camouflage . . . Look, I'll stop fooling around. There's a couple of hard truths you have to get next to. I know what you did. You set up a reflex to blank out any ex-Citizen you might meet. Right?"

"One must keep oneself decent," insisted Drusilla.

LUELLEN shook her head wonderingly. "You're just dumb, girl. I don't like you, but I have to be sorry for you."

"I don't need your pity!"

"Yes, you do. You've been asleep for a whole lot of years and you just have to snap out of it." Luellen knelt and sat back on her heels. "Tell me—up to the time they shipped you here, where did you go?"

"You know perfectly well. The

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Great Hall. My garden. My dormitory. That's all."

"Um-hmm. That's all. And every minute since you were born, you've been conditioned: a Citizen is the finest flower of creation. Be a good obedient girl and you'll gambol on the green for the rest of your life. Meanwhile there are criminals who get sent to prison, and the prison is the lowest cesspool in the Universe where you live out your life being reminded of the glory of the world you lost."

"Of course, but you make it sound—"

"Did you ever see any of those big muscular beautiful men the pictures told you about? Did you ever see that old-granite and new-grass landscape, or get warm under that nice big sun?"

"No, I was sent here before I had—"

Luellen demonstrated her ties to Earth by uttering a syllable which was, above all else, Earthy. "You're the dumbest blind kitten I ever saw. And tell me, when they took you to the ship, did you get a chance to look around?"

"I wasn't . . . worthy," said Drusilla miserably. "If a — a criminal was privileged to see outside the Wall—"

"They blindfolded you. Yes, and you never got a chance to look out of the ship when it left, either. Look, Citizen," she said scornfully, "if you hadn't had the good sense to get yourself sent here, you never would have gotten over the Wall!"

"I had only six more years before I—"

"Before you'd be quietly moved to another Walled Place with your age group. And maybe you'd have been bred, and maybe not, and by the time you realized there was no release for you, you'd be so old you wouldn't care any more. And they call that a world and this a prison!"

Drusilla suddenly put her hands over her ears. "I won't listen to this! I won't!"

Luellen grasped her wrist in a remarkably powerful little hand. "Yes, by God, you will," she said between her perfect teeth. "Our race is old and dying, rotten to the core. Know why you never saw any men? Because there are only a few hundred of them left. They lie in their cubicles and get fat and breed. And most of their children are girls, because that's the way it was arranged so long ago that we've forgotten how it was done or how to change it. You know what's over the Wall? Nothing! It's an ice-world, with a dying sun and thinning air, and a little cluster of Walled Places to breed women for the men to breed with, and a few old, old, worn transmitters for music and pictures to condi-

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tion the blindworms who live and die there!"

DRUSILLA began to cry. Luellen sat back and watched her, a great softness coming into her eyes.

"Cry, that's good, sweetie," she said huskily. "Ah, you poor brat. You could've gotten straightened out the day you arrived. But no. Criminals were the lowest of the low, and you wouldn't associate with them. Earth and humans were insects and savages, because that's what you were taught. To be a Citizen was to be a god among gods, and to hear the music was your torture, for what you'd lost."

"What about the torture?"

"Transmitters in the guardian ships. You know about that."

"But the Citizens on board them—"

"What? Oh, for Pete's sake, hon! They're machines, that's all."

"They're not! The killer-boats are—"

"The killer-boats home on any human mind that begins to operate near the music bands. You had a close call, kitten."

"I wish one had come," Drusilla said miserably. "That's what I wanted."

"One did come, silly. But I don't get you. What did you want?"

"I wanted it to kill me. That's why I taught Chan to—"

Luellen clapped her hands to her face. "I thought that, but I couldn't really believe it! Sweetie, I got news for you. That boat wouldn't have killed you. It was after your boy-friend there."

Drusilla's face went almost as white as her teeth. She put her fist to her mouth and bit it, her eyes round, full of horror.

"It's all right," Luellen murmured. "It's gone. It was homing on him, and when he stopped radiating, it stopped coming. It's just a machine."

"You stopped it," Drusilla breathed. Slowly she sat up straight, staring at the little blonde as if she had never seen her before.

"Pity if one of us couldn't outthink a machine," said Luellen deprecatingly. Then, "What is it, Dru? What's the matter?"

"He might have been . . . killed."

"You only just thought of that. Really thought of it."

Drusilla nodded.

"I'll bet this is the first time you ever thought of someone else. See what snobbery can do?"

"I feel awful."

LUELLEN laughed at her. "You feel fine. Or you will. What you've got is an attack of something called humility. It

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rushes in to fill the hole when the snobbery is snatched out. You'll be all right now."

"Will I?" She licked her lips. She tried to speak and could not. She pointed a wavering finger at the unconscious man.

"Him?" Luellen answered the unspoken question. "Just you keep him asleep for a while. Give him more music, but keep him away from that." She pointed to the sky. "He won't know the difference."

"Humility," said Drusilla, thoughtfully. "That's when you feel . . . not good enough. Is that it?"

"Something like that."

"Then I don't . . . I don't think I understand. Lu, do you know why I killed the Preceptor?"

Luellen shook her head. "It was a good idea, whatever."

Drusilla said with difficulty, "My group went to be chosen for breeding. There's a—custom that the . . . ugliest girl must be sent back to her garden. H-he pointed me out. I was the ugliest one there. He said I was the ugliest woman in the world. I went . . . kind of . . . crazy, I guess. I killed him."

Suddenly she was in Luellen's strong small arms. "Oh, for God's sake," said Luellen with a roughness that made Drusilla cry again. "You're the sorriest most mixed-up little chicken ever. Don't you know that a perfect necklace has to have an ugliest diamond in it somewhere?" She thumped Drusilla's heaving shoulder. "We've been bred for beauty for more generations than this Earth has years, Dru. On Earth you're one of the most beautiful women alive."

"He told me that once, and I could have . . . killed him," Drusilla squeaked. She swallowed hard, moved back to peer piteously into Luellen's face. "Is that humility? To feel you're not good enough?"

"That's humiliation," said Luellen. She paused thoughtfully. "And here's the difference: Humility is knowing something is finer and better than you can ever be, so it's worth putting everything you have behind that something. Everything! Like . . ."

She laughed. "Like me and that ham novelist of mine. Bit by bit, year by year, he gets better. I give him exactly what he needs, in his own time. Right now what he wants is an irresponsible little piece of candy he can pick up or put down, and meantime get envied all over the neighborhood for. He's got it in him to do some really important work some day, and when he does he'll need something else from me, and I'll be here to give it to him. If, fifty years from now, he comes doddering up to me and tells me I've

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grown with him through the years, I'll know I did the thing right."

Drusilla worried at the statement, turning it over, shaking it. She parted her lips, closed them again.

Luellen said, "Go ahead. Ask me."

DRUSILLA looked to her timidly, dropped her eyes. "Is he really finer and better?"

"Snob!" said Luellen, and this time it was all kindliness. "Of course! He's an Earthman, Dru. Earth is young and crude and raw, but it's strong and it's good. Do you call an infant stupid because it can't talk, or is a child bad because it hasn't learned reason? We have nothing but decadence to bring to Earth. So instead we help Earth with the best it has. You keep your eyes open from now on, Dru. Nine women out of ten who truly help their men to realize themselves are what you've been calling criminals.

"You'll find them all over, up and down the social scale, through and through the history of this culture. Put up your shields again — for fun — and watch the women you meet. See how some seem to understand one another on sight—how they pass a glance that seems to be full of secrets. They're the hope of the world, Dru darling, and this world is the hope of the Galaxy." She followed Drusilla's gaze and smiled. "Now that you come to think of it, you love him, don't you?"

"Now that I come to think of it . . ."

She raised her head and looked at the sky. Gradually a smile was born on her trembling lips. She shook herself and took a deep breath of the warm evening air.

"Listen," she said. She laughed unevenly. It *is* sort of scratchy, isn't it?"

—THEODORE STURGEON

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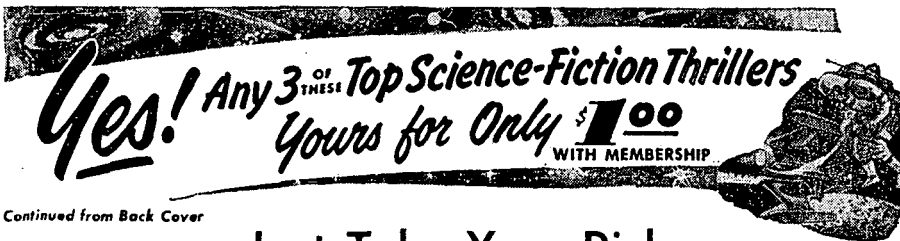

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